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The Philosophical Foundations of Participatory Democracy: Natural, Human, Critical.

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	5
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	6
What is participatory democracy?	7
Two forms of justification	22
Illustrative theorists	24
A critical realist perspective	32
Originality	37
CHAPTER 2 - JOHN DEWEY	38
Dewey as the public philosopher of democracy	39
Dewey's pragmatism in relation to pragmatism generally	42
Dewey and participatory democracy	48
Democracy as social ideal	51
The nature of 'The State'	53
Human nature and democracy	57
Self-realisation and Growth	60
Ethics	66
Concluding comments	73
CHAPTER 3 - G.D.H. COLE	76
Situating Cole	79
Creative intervention	82
Human nature	87
Function	92
Fellowship	96
Capabilities and capacities for self-rule	99
Basic Income - manumission from wavery	101
Concluding comments	105
CHAPTER 4 - ERICH FROMM	108
Developing a psychology of the social	111
Social Character, and the Productive Ideal	112
Existential needs	118
From psychoanalytical to political practice	122
Diagnosing democracy	125
Diagnosing work	131
Towards social and political sanity	135
Towards de-alienated work	141
Concluding comments	149
CHAPTER 5 - BENJAMIN BARBER	151
Representation	154
Searching for positives in negatives	161
The Strong Citizen	175
The institutional concrete	178
Concluding comments	190
CHAPTER 6 - CAROLE PATEMAN	193
Obliged to who, for what?	196
Himself is alone	198
Private into Public 1: Extending the Reach of Democracy	205
Property in the person & Basic Income	217

Private into Public 2: A Feminist Break?	221
Different or differentiated?	225
Concluding comments	228
CHAPTER 7 - CHANTAL MOUFFE	230
Essentialism redivivus	231
Community	244
Democratic structural post-structuralism	251
Articulation or mediation	261
Concluding comments	264
CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSION	266
Introduction	267
The Justificatory Spectrum	268
The Pragmatic Sceptics	271
The Essentialist Affirmers	275
The Critical Realist Contribution	284
Judgmental rationality	289
REFERENCES	302
APPENDIX A	328
APPENDIX A	328
Port Huron Statement	328
APPENDIX B	330
Example of a possible multiple-choice ballot paper	330
Figure 1: The Justificatory Spectrum.....	269

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Abstract

Existing theories of democracy tend to avoid or play-down how democracy can contribute to the development of the realization of fully human being. Participatory democracy is a form of democracy concerned explicitly with deepening the democratic process and ethos. Therefore this thesis examines and analyses a selection of influential moments in twentieth century participatory democracy theory, and identifies two broad strands of philosophical justification, referred to as *essentialist affirmation* and a *pragmatic scepticism*.

The 'essentialist' theorists examined, G.D.H. Cole, Carole Pateman, and Erich Fromm each hold to some form of the general philosophical principle that there are objects in the physical, social, and psychological world which exist and have properties independently of our theoretical concepts of, or discourses about, them.

The *pragmatic sceptics*, John Dewey, Benjamin Barber, and Chantal Mouffe, however, deny such an ontological doctrine and purport to rely wholly on epistemological phenomena to articulate their account of the world. They do, however, hold to varying levels of implicit realism, of social consequences, community, and discourse.

It is the contention of the thesis that the 'real' basis of social life and of its cast of actors, whatever it may turn out to be, cannot be sensibly denied. The ontological, and particularly the metaphysical, realm of human existence, should be given political consideration, and take a more central role in any theory of participatory democracy.

A critical realist perspective offers a persuasive philosophical basis from which to develop explicit ontological foundations for participatory democratic theory. It offers a nuanced awareness of both an essentialist ontology, and of an epistemological relativism which can help us theorize this dual benefit of participatory democracy.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Naturam furca expellas, tamen usque recurret.

Drive nature out with a pitchfork, still ever will she return.

Horace, *Epistles*, I.10.24

This thesis examines the principles by which participatory democracy has been defended and advocated as a uniquely desirable form of democracy. It analyses the work of a number of writers, as a representative selection of twentieth century theories of participatory democracy. While some of these advocates of participatory democracy are quite explicit in presenting it as a means of realising human potential, others see it more as an empirical solution to representative democracy's failure to deliver justice and efficiency in government. Both these approaches to the endorsement of participatory democracy, however, contain a normative aspect. All normative political philosophy must ultimately rest on assumptions, acknowledged or not, about the nature of the human actors which that democracy will serve, and who must bring that democracy into being. It is the purpose of this thesis to identify and analyse those assumptions and pre-suppositions.

This task is approached by identifying two general philosophical predispositions in justifying participatory democracy, here termed a *pragmatic scepticism*, and an *essentialist affirmation*, towards foundational grounds on which analysis or prescription for normative democratic theory is based.

From the detailed analysis of a number of writers articulating these general philosophical approaches the thesis concludes that those theories of participatory democracy which do not include a 'thick' conception of human nature encounter difficulties of internal consistency. As a result the thesis advances the case for critical realism as a body of theory, initially oriented towards the philosophy of science, which offers a persuasive basis for an explicit ontological

foundation to accounts of human, social, and political life, particularly as a ground for participatory democracy theory.

The present chapter introduces the intent and structure of the thesis by distinguishing participatory democracy from both representative and deliberative democracy. It then outlines the two general philosophical predispositions in justifying participatory democracy, *pragmatic scepticism*, and *essentialist affirmation*. Following this the structure of the rest of the thesis will be rehearsed by introducing the illustrative theorists of these two predispositions, before offering, in the forth section, a broad outline of the content and potential of critical realist theory. The chapter ends with the theses claims to originality.

What is participatory democracy?

The term *participatory democracy* appears to have been coined in 1960 by Arnold Kaufman.¹ Certainly Kaufman anticipated the area of this study in his article 'Human nature and participatory democracy', particularly with, as he put it, the claim that participatory democracy "differs, and differs quite fundamentally, from a representative system ... designed to safeguard human rights and ensure social order. *This distinction is all-important.*"² While human rights and social order are far from inconsequential, they are a rather incomplete account of the conditions for nurturing human potential and giving direction to our individual and collective destiny. It is readily acknowledged that representative democracy is not of course a static entity, and a number of theoretical and practical developments have responded to the various challenges it has encountered on its progress to its present pre-eminence. These

¹ The Kaufman article in question is, Arnold Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," in *The Bias of Pluralism*, ed. William E. Connolly (New York: Atherton Press, [1960] 1969). This is offered on the authority of Mansbridge, Jane Mansbridge, "On Deriving Theory from Practice," in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, *Real Utopias Project* (London: Verso, 2003).

² Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," 184.

developments can either move conservatively away from the democratic ideal, or progressively embrace it, in a number of forms.

A huge variety of political regimes claimed to be 'democratic', and very few career politicians or citizens would openly abandon a commitment to democratic principles. This wide usage of the term, however, threatens to empty it of useful meaning. It is in danger of becoming little more than a legitimating label. This is partly a consequence of definitional intricacy, and of ideological hubris; the two are no doubt connected.³ Two and a half thousand years of democratic history is thus reduced to the acceptable credential of membership to respectability, through the maintenance of notionally 'democratic' institutions. Certainly, if 'democracy' is held to be a closed and discrete category, where regimes can be sorted in or out on the basis of claims to a few institutional factors, such a semantic emptying is inevitable. A good deal of the literature on democracy and democratic theory seeks to identify democracy along precisely these lines. For instance:

[A system is democratic] to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote - [such that political scientists can] rather easily come up with a list of those countries that are clearly democratic, [and] those that are clearly not...⁴

If Huntington's definition is to be taken as a contribution to the analysis and practice of democracy, which it appears to have, along with others of a similar nature, then democracy does indeed become little more than a category to make life easier for political scientists,

³ Barry Holden, *The Nature of Democracy* (London: Nelson, 1974), 6.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 7-8. see also Axel Hadenius, *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9, Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America, Studies in Rationality and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

and a 'gentleman's' club which bestows a surface respectability, attracting tourists, trade, and aid. Whether a regime is clearly democratic, or clearly not, offers us a very limited way of looking at a phenomenon which has a far-reaching effect on human being. It also gives us very little by way of guidance in seeking to improve inadequate regimes, usefully analysing better ones, or discerning one from the other.

Justifications for democracy as the best form of political organisation tend to focus only on the instrumental ability of it to produce better decisions than its competitors.⁵ Though this is a rather narrow perspective, it nevertheless generally rests on the utility of participation as a good, although the extent and level of participation is of course by no means uncontested. Schumpeter, Berelson et al, McClosky, and Sartori are all notable in their distrust of too much participation.⁶ In reviewing the alternatives to democracy, however, Dahl shows that the main contender, what he calls 'guardianship', is something of a non-starter.⁷ The possibility of identifying a group of potential rulers with superior knowledge and talent, and of guaranteeing their incorruptible virtue, is plagued with difficulty. Knowledge and talent are spread throughout the population, and the virtue of moral and intellectual autonomy go with them. A permanent narrow system of leadership would thus be irrational and contradictory to the value of such moral and intellectual autonomy. The moral good is also held to be distinctly unfixed, particularly by the *pragmatic sceptics*, as such the moral good cannot be knowable by an isolated fixed elite.

⁵ Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), Michael Saward, "Postmodernists, Pragmatists and the Justification of Democracy," *Economy and society* 23, no. 2 (1994), Michael Saward, *The Terms of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

⁶ B.R. Berelson, P.F. Lazarsfeld, and W.N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (Wayne State University, 1962), Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1987), J.A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1943).

⁷ Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 52-79, Saward, *The Terms of Democracy*, 21-24.

The inevitable fallibility of human knowledge is also a limit on the self-understanding of both 'Guardians', elected, and electors. As Hyland puts it, "There can be no presumption at all that some external authority will understand the interests of a mass of diverse people better than they will understand themselves."⁸ Pleas to superior technical knowledge as justification for a guardian leadership are no less problematic. The line from means to ends is not, however, entirely a technical issue, as it calls for value judgments not only on ends, but on appropriate means also. Dahl is insistent that the technical competence of experts is often less reliable than that of 'ordinary' people.⁹

Democracy also offers openness and diversity of input to the political process. A useful variety of imaginative and possible solutions to problems are thus available. This openness and diversity is also essential to the legitimation of the decisions which flow from the essentially human, thus fallible, phenomena of engaged, rational, and productive activity. Although this is a strictly indirect consequence of democracy it is also a vitally important and unique feature of it as a form of political organisation. It is indirect insofar as the benefit of it is distinctly social. It is not dependent on personal, individual participation even though the possibility of participation transmits its benefit to the whole of society through the effects of increased openness and diversity of input. Distinctly individual consequences also accrue through democratic participation, which are often ignored or derided by democratic theorists. Theorists of participatory democracy are, however, rather more finely tuned to these consequences. For participatory democrats personal, meaningful participation is emphasised and investigated as rather more fundamental aspects of democracy-as-such.

The ability to realise the social virtue of democratic participation and the value it can have for individual lives is intimately and

⁸ James L. Hyland, *Democratic Theory: The Philosophical Foundations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 185.

⁹ Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 75.

necessarily linked. The values spoken of here are the consequences of active participation in political life on the cognitive and moral capacities of human beings, and the exercise of the distinctive capabilities of human beings to be autonomous, creative, and responsible. Thus we can see the necessary link, or lineage, from governmental and instrumental virtue, to human and moral virtue as a distinctly valuable activity: the line from the instrumental to the metaphysical, or the epistemological to the ontological, in the nature of democracy as a political system.

It is evident that it makes little sense to hold to a categorical conception of democracy and use its terms unproblematically to say that any given regime is, or is not, 'democratic'. A scale or continuum of democratic practice, on the other hand, would offer a way to picture the range of virtues it possesses, both direct and indirect.¹⁰ It would also indicate the presence of these various characteristics to greater or lesser degrees of effectivity.¹¹ Beetham, for instance, argues that democracy should be theorised as a continuum or spectrum, where at one extreme people have no control over, and are totally excluded from, the decision-making process. Whereas, at the other extreme, the most democratic arrangement will be "where all members of the collectivity enjoy effective equal rights to take part in such decision-making directly - one, that is to say, which realises to the greatest conceivable degree the principles of popular control and equality in its exercise."¹² A conceptualisation of democracy along these lines indicates the variety of democratic political arrangements which have existed, and also shows a line of progress towards *more* democratic situations. Such a situation might consist in elections and representative offices, but these will, by no means, be sufficient conditions by themselves.

Conceptualisations of this kind, however, continue to leave us somewhat adrift. Despite their recognition of the limits of generally

¹⁰ Saward, *The Terms of Democracy*, 145-47.

¹¹ Hyland, *Democratic Theory*, 163-64.

¹² David Beetham, "Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization," in *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*, ed. David Held (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 55.

accepted democratic practices they remain instrumental and normatively thin accounts of democracy. Whether as a thing, a single entity, or as a differentiated continuum, democracy continues to be put forward as a means to a rather limited range of ends.

This is odd, as from its very inception democracy was much more than a mere instrumental arrangement. For instance, in his funeral oration honouring the dead of the Peloponnesian Wars, Pericles praised the glory of Athenian democracy. He exalted the benefits of just rule to be derived from democracy, but he also nevertheless praised what would generally be considered "merely consequential characteristics" of democracy.¹³ To the Athenians democracy was an essential element to a complete way of life, which was inseparable from its particular political system; a way of life imbued with the spirit of pluralist tolerance, rational obedience to written and unwritten law, and to persons in positions of authority, a great many of which were filled by lot,¹⁴ and which valued a high level of political knowledge in the citizenry.¹⁵ The very quality of human being was an essential component of Athenian democracy, at least for those able to engage in it.

Democracy all but disappeared as a system of government after 322BC for some two thousand years, apart from short interludes in the Italian city republics and a brief episode in the English Revolution¹⁶, before reappearing in the form of revolutionary upheaval in America and France in the eighteenth century. The development of the new mass democracy was a distinctly messy one,

¹³ See for instance Jon Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory," in *Foundations of Social Choice Theory*, ed. Jon Elster and Aanund Hylland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁴ Herman Hansen Mogens, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Democracy, The Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 227.

¹⁵ Rex Warner and Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954).

¹⁶ Eduard Bernstein, *Cromwell & Communism: Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1988[1930]), H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1998), Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

commencing from an extremely negative meaning, where democracy was considered a degenerate form of government.¹⁷ As Mill observed, however, there is "a strong tendency in the modern world towards a democratic constitution of society."¹⁸ The abandonment of serfdom and slavery, the development of mass industry, and the growth of an urban working class, plus any number of revolutions, all attested to this irresistible tendency of the logic of democracy to spread and grow as a social idea.

If the coming of democracy could not be unequivocally resisted, then it must be managed, to prevent 'a tyranny of the majority' extending the logic of democracy from the social arena into the political or even to the redistribution of wealth and property. Democracy was seen as ultimately unleashing "a voracious mass confiscatory force".¹⁹ Mass *democracy* developed in the space where this tension between inevitable social evolution and fear of confiscation met. In this space Mill hoped that "institutional cleverness might contain the levelling impulse".²⁰ In this developing, mass political environment, numbers mattered. Vast numbers of people rioting in the streets were much less preferable to orderly numbers of votes cast at regularly predictable intervals. This mass of persons, electors, could be managed in a number of ways; through property rights, through gender, tests of literacy, and of civic knowledge; and the powers of the government thus elected could also be limited. The ever-present 'democratic' threat of the 'tyranny of the majority' could be avoided by guaranteeing individual rights

¹⁷ Charles S. Maier, "Democracy since the French Revolution," in *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993*, ed. John Dunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 125-26.

¹⁸ Mill, John Stuart, and Millicent Garrett Fawcett. *On Liberty: Representative Government. The Subjection of Women; Three Essays*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963. 126

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

against encroaching government interference, through an immutable constitution.²¹

Established elites did not have things all their own way, however, as the advocates of democracy responded by trying to limit the power of representatives through the notion of 'prospective control'. This emerged simultaneously in England, France, and the United States of America in the eighteenth century where mandates prescribed the actions of representatives. This was, however, rejected as contra to the needs of representative democracy.²² A leadership was instead to be invested with the loan and safekeeping of the individual sovereignty of the entitled members of the 'electorate'. Burke, for instance was clear that, as a democratically elected representative he owed his constituents "not his industry only, but his judgment" and he would be betraying, not serving them, if he sacrificed that judgment to their opinion.²³ The representative elite was of course only partially autonomous due to the potential the electorate had for removing its representatives every few years through its vote. This is the 'anticipation of retrospective control' Elster identifies as the safeguard over general sovereignty.²⁴ Democracy therefore became a distinctly governmental form of politics, where even the direct participants themselves were somewhat removed from control over their own destiny. As the party system developed, to mobilise the marginally necessary electorate, the power of the individual representative was further weakened.

Meanwhile, the representative leadership in parliament needed a permanent techno-bureaucratic administration to replace the democratic administration by lot which Athenian citizenship took for granted as a civic duty, where "the citizen who takes no part in these

²¹ For a conceptual analysis of the transition from the direct democracy of Athens to representative democracy, see Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government, Themes in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²² Jon Elster, *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

²³ Edmund Burke, "Speech to the Electors of Bristol, November 3, 1774," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1907[1899]), 95.

²⁴ Elster, *Deliberative Democracy*, 3.

duties is regarded not as unambitious but as useless".²⁵ As the tasks of the state became more complex and political nations larger and more heterogeneous, however, these nineteenth-century institutional forms of liberal democracy seemed to be increasingly inadequate to the problems of the twentieth century. The demands of this particular form of democracy had begun to take its toll on society; most especially on the quality of citizenship and participation. A growing body of sociological evidence began to suggest that citizens, removed from daily political life by the call on their views only at election time, were no longer capable of meeting the demands of 'classical' democracy.²⁶ As a consequence, the mechanism of electing a political leadership to elite legislative and executive offices came to be seen as ineffective. The central ideals of representative democracy, of building political consensus through dialogue, of formulating and putting into practice public policies to ensure a productive economy and healthy society, were no longer being accomplished.²⁷ The clearest analysis and critique of representative democracy, and its corrosive effects on citizenship, is Schumpeter's analysis of actually existing democracy.²⁸ His work also exposes the weak rhetorical basis of the defence of representative democracy.

Schumpeter argues that representative leadership in a mass democracy had led to a democratic system whereby, in effect, only elected representatives and the policy elite are fully engaged political agents. There is a void in democratic theory between the mass of the citizenry, and engaged and competent political actors. Schumpeter's analysis, however, largely ignores any intermediate groupings which might operate between these two poles of isolated

²⁵ Warner and Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*.

²⁶ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, see particularly Pateman's critique of this term, Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

²⁷ Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, "Introduction: Thinking About Empowered Participatory Governance," in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, *Real Utopias Project* (London: Verso, 2002), 3.

²⁸ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

individual citizens and competing elite groups. They occupy two different worlds connected only briefly by election campaigns. The mass of citizens thus come to be uninterested in politics and do not bother to inform themselves about it. Schumpeter recommends that they should therefore be discouraged from getting too deeply involved in matters of state.²⁹ He resigned himself to this state of affairs as the least bad, partly chastened no doubt by the effects of mass political involvement in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

There were two general responses in democratic theory to the work of Schumpeter, apart from those who pursued this 'realist' stance in 'normal' political science: pluralism/polyarchy; and participatory democracy.³⁰ Initially a development of American political science during the 1950's, pluralism was drawn on a Madisonian concern with the 'problem of factions'. The later pluralists, such as Dahl, Truman, Almond, and Verba widened the realm of analysis to include more of 'civil society', more of the factions in the scope of democratic agency.³¹ Pluralism described the processes resulting from individuals combining in association to compete for moments of political power, in 'interest' or 'pressure' groups.³² It is this existence of a diversity of competing interests in civil society that pluralists highlight as the basis of a democratic polity. This conception is grounded in a view of people as satisfaction-maximisers in a market of competitive exchange.³³ It also remains a distinctly empirical form of theory, a descriptive-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁰ Kuhn's phrase is used advisedly to refer to Berelson et al, Sartori, McClosky and many others. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Second Edition, Enlarged* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, London, 1970).

³¹ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), Robert A. Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City* (London: Yale University Press, 1961), David Bicknell Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971).

³² Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory*, 89-94.

³³ John Elster, "Some Conceptual Problems in Political Theory," in *Power and Political Theory: Some European Perspectives*, ed. Brian Barry (London: Wiley, 1976).

explanatory account, which is 'realistic' in the same way as Schumpeter's theory, which also purports to be 'objective'. For early pluralists, power is non-hierarchically organised amongst competing groups of interests; businesses and their representative organisations, trade unions, ethnic groups, consumer groups, women's organisations, motoring associations, etc.³⁴ All these groups are seen as engaging in a free-floating political arrangement, with no single powerful centre. Rather, there exists a diverse plurality of policy-formation and decision-making moments.³⁵ In effect there is democratic government by minorities which "vastly increase the size, number, and variety of minorities whose preference must be taken into account by leaders in making policy choices."³⁶

So, where Schumpeter saw competing elites endorsed occasionally by the electorate as the only realistic matter of democratic politics, the pluralists believed that central government was partially tied to the activities of the vast middle-ground of civil society. In competition with each other for an occasional moment in the political limelight, these groups created a consensus of political values by which the leaders were constrained. In sum, for pluralists, representative liberal democracy was working very well. A transmission system of participation was effectively communicating the plurality of citizen desires to a necessarily responsive representative leadership. 'Anticipation of retrospective control' was held to be working very well.

Dahl eventually, however, came to appreciate the naivety of this formulation. He recognised that the unequal distribution of economic resources produced hierarchical forms of governance hostile to political liberty.³⁷ These inimical political forms are of course also deeply hostile to the development of human capacities and

³⁴ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 202.

³⁵ Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 508.

³⁶ Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory*, 132-33.

³⁷ Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985), 55. See also Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

opportunities. So serious is this imbalance that Dahl even entertained, for a while, a recognition that the right to self-government took precedence over the right to private property.³⁸ For Dahl, genuine political liberty required the extension of democracy over the economic realm, to co-operative ownership, and control of enterprises, to democratic workers' control in the workplace and the economy as a whole.³⁹

The second response to Schumpeter's analysis began to emerge in theories of participatory democracy. Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory* was a direct response to the work of Schumpeter and Dahl for instance.⁴⁰ She was particularly critical of Schumpeter's characterisation of 'classical democracy', and showed that participatory forms of democracy were indeed empirically robust phenomena. At about the same time Gorz made a radical analysis of the world of work,⁴¹ and in Britain, encouraged and organised by the Institute for Workers' Control, the Shop Steward Movement was also very active.⁴² In academic circles as well the limits of liberal representative democracy were being rethought by C.B. MacPherson.⁴³ The contributions of Cole, Fromm, and Pateman, share

³⁸ Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy*, 162.

³⁹ Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 311-41. In the following chapters of this thesis sentiments like these will find expression in the much earlier work of Dewey and Cole.

⁴⁰ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

⁴¹ André Gorz, *The Division of Labour: The Labour Process and Class-Struggle in Modern Capitalism* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976 [1964]).

⁴² Ken Coates, *Participation or Control?*, *Pamphlet Series; 1* (London: Bertrand Russell Centre for Social Research, 1967), Ken Coates, *Workers' Control: Witnesses and Testimony from the Institute for Worker's Control*, ed. Ken Coates, *Socialist Renewal* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2003), Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The New Unionism: The Case for Workers' Control* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

⁴³ C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 202, C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 6, C.B. Macpherson, *The Rise and Fall of Economic Justice, and Other Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 59. MacPherson's conception of human nature is drawn from Marx's early humanist thinking. See the recent critical

similar roots, which each of them nonetheless pursue and enlarge in varying and diverse directions. These developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s were, however, a revival of early twentieth century ideas.

Syndicalist, anarchist and socialist political activity in the early years of the twentieth century sought to organise and mobilise the industrial working class and the newly emerging mass electorate. Council communists such as Trotsky, Pannekoek, and Luxemburg; syndicalists such as Sorel, Pouget, and Griffuelhes, anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Proudhon, and also Antonio Gramsci, working on *L'Ordine Nuovo* in Turin with the Factory Council Movement (which also flourished in Russia, Germany and Hungary), each in different ways began to extend the sphere of engaged political agency to the rest of the citizenry. The working-class itself was the motor of this movement. Driven by different variants of socialist theory, it sought to extend and deepen the political control that democracy promised, and to control the economic activity of which they were a necessary but powerless part. This principally operated through the trade unions and the idea of industrial democracy. Participatory democracy also had a more sustained existence in Yugoslavian self-management.⁴⁴ As we can see, throughout the twentieth century, participatory democracy was much more than a theoretical idea. It found widespread practical expression in the trade union and labour movement generally, and later and more specifically for industrial democracy, through the Shop Steward Movement, the organisational forms of the feminist movement, and even in British government through Tony Benn's brief term as Secretary of State for Industry in 1974.

biography of MacPherson by Jules Townshend. Jules Townshend, *C.B. Macpherson and the Problem of Liberal Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

⁴⁴ Milojko Drulovic, *Self Management on Trial* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1978), 33-78, Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

Deliberation (again) and beyond

A more recent reaction to the problems of liberal democracy is that of deliberative democracy. Elster identifies Edmund Burke as the author of "the most famous statement of the case for deliberative democracy", in his speech to the electorate of Bristol in 1774.⁴⁵ Burke was a deliberative democrat, claims Elster, because he refused to be bound by the instructions of his electorate. The current vogue for deliberative democracy, however, concentrates its attention on enhancing the legitimacy of representative democracy's law-making procedure. Here, open deliberation by citizens engaged in practical reasoning is considered the best guarantor of legitimate autonomous self-governance.⁴⁶ John Dryzek has recently shown, however, that, while deliberative democracy holds a great deal of promise for the authentic deepening of democracy, there is a vital need for a discursive element to be added to it.⁴⁷ He insists that talk is not enough, and that the promise of democratic authenticity held by 'the deliberative turn' in democratic theory "can only be redeemed to the extent of a critical orientation to established power structures."⁴⁸ Without a deep understanding of the structural occlusions, social, economic, and ontological, in which deliberation is situated an 'ideal speech situation' is unlikely to come about on its own. While no form of democracy openly seeks to deny opportunities to deliberate, without such a deep and penetrating analysis deliberative democracy remains, in Saward's words, little more than a suggestive and interesting "sideshow in democratic theory."⁴⁹ Deliberation seeks to bring about a change in preferences through non-coercive communication. Because of this, an exclusive reliance on the

⁴⁵ Burke, "Speech to the Electors of Bristol, November 3, 1774." Cited in Elster, *Deliberative Democracy*, 3. See note 23 above.

⁴⁶ See particularly, the contributions of Elster, Habermas, and Cohen to James Bohman and William Rehg, *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1997), Elster, *Deliberative Democracy*.

⁴⁷ John S Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 162.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Saward, *The Terms of Democracy*, 65.

deliberative institutions of the liberal state is out of the question.⁵⁰ Further, Dryzek suggests that all governments remain fundamentally concerned with the maintenance of the confidence of actual and potential investors. This is increasingly the case in a globalised economy.⁵¹ Preference changing must therefore occur in a plurality of discursive arenas, where the powers that alter and pervert preferences can be radically challenged. As Dryzek says:

The deliberative turn in democratic theory promises a renewed focus on the authenticity of democracy, thus deepening democracy. But that promise remains unfulfilled so long as deliberative democracy remains confined to the constitutional surface of political life. ... A more critical project of discursive democracy has to get beneath the surface to reveal and construct the extra-constitutional factors that can prevent or distort political dialogue and its connection to collective decision making.⁵²

For Dryzek, then, an effective emancipatory democracy cannot be just about talk 'guaranteed' by a fixed constitution, it must also be about the deeper structures that talk is articulating or serving.

For our democracies to be effective we need to know the range of social, political, and economic structures which we might be dealing with. To render a full account these must also include that deep structure of human being itself, human nature. As Kaufman stated in 1960:

The main justifying function of participation is development of man's [sic] essential powers - including human dignity and respect, and making men responsible by developing their powers of deliberate action... For the

⁵⁰ Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, 162.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 165. See also Charles Edward Lindblom, *Politics and Markets: The World's Political-Economic Systems* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

⁵² Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, 175.

persistent truth is that participation is an essential condition of the good society and the good life.⁵³

The enduring problems of democracy can be seen as a continuing dialectical tension between the contradictory forces of social and economic structures, and the deep ontological 'structure' of the human agent, which representative democracy, no matter how pluralist, and deliberative democracy, no matter how constitutionally rational, are both inadequate to deal with. Participatory democracy is a distinct path in democratic theory which marks out the inadequacies of representative democracy on a number of levels. This path deepens and broadens the imagined range of participation in democratic influence and control. Deliberative democracy is one articulation of the fine detail of this move to a fully participatory democracy. It remains however merely talk.

As has been alluded to already, there are a number of other influences, interpretations, and philosophical grounds to each justification of participatory democracy. These various threads are expressed in two distinct traditions of philosophical approach, namely, pragmatic scepticism and essentialist affirmation

Two forms of justification: Pragmatic Scepticism, and Essentialist Affirmation

In order to survey previous theoretical engagements with participatory democracy, and to delineate their convergences and continuities, I propose a two-fold categorisation of the various forms of philosophical justification. While all the theorists I analyse are firm advocates of participatory democracy they approach this advocacy from two distinct philosophical traditions. These traditions have been articulated and contested in many forms throughout philosophical history, and the enduring dispute between 'universal' and 'particular' explanations goes back at least to Plato, and

⁵³ Kaufman, "Human Nature and Participatory Democracy," 198-99.

probably to Socrates and beyond.⁵⁴ The presentation of these two positions prepares the way for a consideration of a critical realist alternative.

In *What is Nature?* Kate Soper utilised the categories of a 'sceptical' and an 'affirming' attitude towards universals to examine the variety of philosophical approaches to understanding the human relationship with 'nature'.⁵⁵ I intend to adapt these categories to the task of analysing various ways of justifying participatory democracy. A *pragmatic sceptical* tradition emphasises the discursive and revisable quality of what is claimed to be 'natural' to human beings and their societies.⁵⁶ Here 'nature' in human subjectivities and affairs is a concept through which social conventions and cultural norms are continuously contested and revised. Pragmatic sceptics emphasise the need to form an accommodation between inevitable differences of interests, and metaphysical or ontological arguments are variously dismissed as ideological, unscientific, or unreliable. Any appeal to the idea of essence in this philosophical tradition is seen as an attempt to 'eternalise' what is merely conventional. Instead it invites us to view human nature as entirely a linguistic, cultural construction.⁵⁷

Essentialists, on the other hand, hold that if a democratic system is to serve the interests of humanity, a clear conception of human being is of the utmost importance.⁵⁸ This approach finds its original expression as far back as Aristotle's commitment to eudemonia or flourishing (which also returns explicitly in Bhaskar's critical realism). This position holds that human flourishing, and the full

⁵⁴ D.M. Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder; London: Westview Press, 1989), 1.

⁵⁵ Kate Soper, *What Is Nature?: Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 37 vols., vol. Capitalist production (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), 759, n2. "To know what is useful for a dog, one must study dog-nature. This nature itself is not to be deduced from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would criticise all human acts, movements, relations, etc., by the principle of utility, must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch."

development of the particular human potentials, can be encouraged in non-antagonistic social structures. By implication, this also identifies antagonistic circumstances which can not only obstruct flourishing, but actually create negative consequences. We are thus presented with the contrast between a philosophy which directs us to the human nature we are stunting, perverting or blocking, and a philosophy which asserts that appeals to natural essences are little more than ideological power games. From a 'realist' perspective, by contrast, human nature can refer to the potential available in, and the limits imposed by, the ontological structure of the world. The critical realist concepts of emergent powers refer to just these potentials, and the limits on what it is possible for human beings to be and do. It is a realm of determinations that we violate only at the cost of certain alienation from, or loss of, self. In this sense realism provides the essential gauge by which we may judge the 'liberating' and 'repressive' quality of human institutions and cultural forms.

Illustrative theorists

The thesis examines and analyses in detail representatives of these two divergent tendencies to illustrate the continuity of the traditions through the twentieth century and the separation, but continuity between them. Each theorist will thus be examined in a broadly chronological order, and each analysis will conclude with a review of the major contributions of their justification of participatory democracy, and a critical realist reading of those contributions and their problems. The selection of theorists is by no means a comprehensive catalogue, but is intended rather as a representative selection of relevant theorists.

From the pragmatic tradition I examine John Dewey, Benjamin Barber, and Chantal Mouffe, and from the essentialist tradition, G.D.H. Cole, Erich Fromm, and Carole Pateman. It may be regarded as striking that, in a discussion of theorists of participatory democracy, Jurgen Habermas is absent. In *any* normative theory of democracy, participatory or otherwise,

questions of what democracy is thought to be *for* are of central importance. The contribution of Habermas is an exemplar of this principle. Habermas only has a theory of deliberation, of how we should talk to each other.

As Dryzek has shown, however, a deepened and broadened democracy must be about a great deal more than talk.⁵⁹ What concerns Habermas and his followers is the *procedure* by which existing representative politics might regain legitimacy and thereby its authority to govern over us. Habermas' deliberative democracy could thus most usefully be considered as a sub-set of participatory democratic theory, dealing with one detailed aspect of the functioning of any future existing participatory democracy.

On the other hand the inclusion of John Dewey might, to some minds, seem unusual. In considering this inclusion in the *pragmatic sceptical* thread a number of factors were considered conclusive. In general terms Dewey was a major figure in American public life during the first third of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ His influence as a public philosopher continued beyond his death in 1953, and has been further enhanced by Richard Rorty's appropriation of pragmatism.⁶¹ The depth and breadth of Dewey's philosophical range is astounding, as was his engagement with the challenging political issues of his long public and academic life. His importance to democratic educational thought is undisputed, although his particular place in the development of participatory democracy theory is less widely appreciated. His commitment to what he saw as the virtue of the scientific method: the open tribunal of informed opinion, discussion and debate of problems and solutions, where all opinions are valid,

⁵⁹ Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*, 162.

⁶⁰ See particularly the biographies by Alan Ryan, and Robert Westbrook. Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁶¹ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

while perhaps rather an idealist picture of science itself, acts as a model for what he saw democracy as being in the service of a deep faith in society and individuals.

The first chapter dealing with the theorists will examine and analyse Dewey's conception of the scientific method. His epistemology pervades all areas of his thought: philosophical, educational, psychological, and political, and remains pertinent and influential today. Its impact on his characterisation of human nature is profound and in turn patterns his theory *and* practice in participatory democratic forms. After examining his scientific epistemology, his scattered views on human nature are mapped out, before proceeding to their theoretical and practical consequences for participatory democracy. Dewey believed that the well-being of each person and of our common life could be enhanced through a democracy of participation. This should be an encompassing way of life, of 'democracy as a social idea', rather than merely 'political democracy'.⁶² What Dewey calls *democratic faith* underpins all this thinking and hope for political renewal. He saw democratic faith as a tool for improving social conditions in a world of flux and change, for realising the self, and for promoting individual growth. As with the practice of science, democracy is also essentially a social process, and in Dewey's formulation only the evidence of immediate experience is valid. Hence he developed the concept of 'radical empiricism', which asserts that no recourse to *a priori* constructions or broad causal explanations is either satisfactory or helpful.

The second chapter investigates the neglected field of G.D.H. Cole's ontology, specifically his understanding of human nature, so that we might better understand why he formulated the concrete proposals for which he is famous. This is pursued through the examination of a number of themes found in his work: human needs, particularly the creative aspect of work; the innate capacity for self-rule; and the inter-connectedness of individuals. One consequence of Cole's approach is to re-emphasise social power as *power to*, in

⁶² John Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," ([1927]).

preference to *power over*, so that we might apprehend possibility rather than merely describe what is.⁶³ The possibility thus identified finds expression in the social and personal *functions* we seek to enact. In ordering the relative places in our lives of these functions our selfhood develops as a co-ordinating principle over and above our individual instances.⁶⁴ For Cole this conceptualisation of *self-hood* becomes an essential element in his theory of our nature, which is unavoidably a *social* principle. This view of the human condition, of the needs and desires of individual social agents, was distilled by Cole from his analysis of the trade union activism of the time. Trade unions were beginning to employ collective bargaining not only to improve wages and hours, but to challenge the diverse collective and individual points of injustices they endured in the workplace.⁶⁵ Under the influence of syndicalism these examples of vigorous trade union activity, which began to push for the collective control of industry itself, represented to Cole glimpses of what democracy could and should be.⁶⁶ The key challenge for Cole was to find ways to make these unusual outbreaks of democracy the usual state of democratic affairs.

The chapter on Erich Fromm furthers the investigation of this *essentialist* element identified in participatory democracy theory. Fromm's work, which began the development of social psychology, sought to merge sociology and psychology by integrating Freud's theory with Marx's insight that social and economic forces have fundamental effects on individual consciousness. Particularly, he developed the concept of *social character* to account for how social classes adapt to structural changes in ways which occlude the promise of freedom which material progress offers. If this promise is

⁶³ G.D.H. Cole, *Social Theory* (London: Methuen, 1920), 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-49. emphasis added

⁶⁵ G.D.H. Cole, *The World of Labour: A Discussion of the Present and Future of Trade Unions*, 4th ed. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1919[1913]), 8.

⁶⁶ Ricardo Blaug, "The Tyranny of the Visible: Problems in the Evaluation of Anti-Institutional Radicalism.," *Organization* 6, no. 1 (1999), James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Harvard University Press, 1990), Sheldon Wolin, "'Fugitive Democracy,'" *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (1994).

not grasped, and maladaptive, alienated characters are formed, what is it that we are alienated from? What would freedom feel like? Fromm is able to respond to such questions with an unabashed commitment to a humanistic ethics and an understanding of human nature. He is clear that advances in political democracy have made real and lasting improvements in peoples lives, moving them away from irrational authoritarianism and towards freedom. But he is equally clear that democracy as it exists fails to deliver on its promise of empowering and liberating its citizens. Through a democracy of participation, extended into social and economic spheres, he believed that a non-theistic religiosity, similar in tenor to Dewey's democratic faith, would encourage the realization of the *productive character* and a 'being' mode of life.

An enormously important concern in Fromm's account is that of the nature of work, not as the deadening joyless 'travail' of paid employment, but as creative intervention with nature. We rise beyond an animal nature when we work and create ourselves as independent, free social beings. This is central to his conception of what it is to be fulfilled human beings, and to his teleology of self-realisation. For Fromm, the key to human psychology lies not in the biological specificity of our physical properties but in the fact that we possess, in addition to instincts, the distinctively human traits of self-awareness, reason, and imagination. These traits, however, partially remove us from the security of a mere instinctual, 'natural' existence. They give rise to 'existential needs' for meaning, needs for relatedness, effectiveness, and a frame of orientation and devotion, that must be met to ensure emotional and existential integrity.⁶⁷ The means by which these needs can be met are largely conditioned by the socio-economic environment. It is this insight which spurred Fromm's desire to see deep democratic participation extended to all areas of social life, to begin to inculcate human needs into the socio-economic system.

⁶⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1990 [1955]), 68.

Chapter four returns to the *pragmatic sceptical* thread of the thesis, and deals with the work of Benjamin Barber. His basic stance is that, far from living in what is widely regarded as an apathetic, apolitical age, there is in truth far more political activity occurring than we might imagine. It is simply that this activity is not the 'high' politics of liberal democracy. The democracy we have has been repeatedly compromised by liberal institutions and the philosophy which supports it. What is needed, Barber insists, is a revivification of the concept of citizenship, to make the best use of the energies that are, often unknowingly, already applied to *political* activity. A thoroughgoing reassessment of the role of philosophy in political theory and practice is his main target in this revivification of democratic life. The universalist aspect of liberal philosophy, which sustains the apparent apathy of contemporary political participation, must be discarded for a philosophy of radical contingency. There are, he insists, no independent grounds upon which to base political and social judgement. All we can rely on is action-in-practice. In this he displays the sense of continuity with Dewey which we shall also observe in Mouffe. We are adrift "on a sea [where] there is ... neither starting point nor appointed destination."⁶⁸ It is just this groundlessness, Barber asserts, which makes a participatory democracy necessary to create a "community capable of transforming dependent private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods."⁶⁹ So, there are it appears, embedded in this theory, states of being it is good to pursue and those it is good to discard. Barber's case for radical contingency will be analysed and the nature of the implied public good explained. For instance, he examines at length the psychological framework of liberalism and its potential for social pathology. If liberalism does indeed have pathological effects, what would a healthy, flourishing citizen and society look like? How would the continued health

⁶⁸ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1962). quoted in Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy, Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 120.

⁶⁹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 119.

between citizen and political structures be analysed and maintained? These are questions which an avowed groundless, non-metaphysical perspective might realistically be presumed to have difficulty with.

Chapter five reverts to the *essentialist* sequence of the thesis, and examines the work of Carole Pateman which offers us the opportunity to extend the discussion of human nature into gendered nature. The extent of Pateman's commitment to essentialism, either in terms of human essence or female essence presents an elusive thread. I argue there *is* an underlying concept of human nature in general, as distinct from human nature modified by culture, embedded in Pateman's work. The participatory democracy she advocates so eloquently would give full expression to this general human nature. Her interest throughout is the construction of a democracy predicated on the idea of a participatory society.

Feminism as a whole provides democracy with its most important critique and challenge. That there are differences in civil standing between the sexes is not difficult to see, but anti-democrats and anti-feminists glibly account for these differences through appeal to *natural* differences between the sexes. Thus discussion of *a* human nature is distinctly problematised by the questions raised by feminism. As a consequence anti-essentialist perspectives have gained great currency in feminist thinking. Recently, however, a number of feminists have expressed concern about the loss of universally applicable human norms.⁷⁰ Pateman's appeal to universalism to provide the tools for securing equality for women, by no means implies some kind of universal liberal social contract.⁷¹

⁷⁰ A Assiter, *Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1996), Rebecca Boone, *Essentialism as a Grand Unifying Theory: Response to Conflicts in Feminism* (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 1992), Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1990).

⁷¹ Carole Pateman, "Democracy and Democratization: Presidential Address: XVIth World Congress, IPSA," *International Political Science Review* 17, no. 1 (1996). pp 5-12 Cf. Martha Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings," in *Women, Culture and Development*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and J. Glover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Amartya Sen, "Capability and Well-Being," in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

Although Pateman sees political obligation as a fact, a concept with ancient Greek roots in the concept of the *zoon politikon*, as necessary for the sustainable self-governance in human society, obligation is, however, not an intermittently re-presented gift, but is properly understood as participatory, political activity as a *virtue*.

The last of the chapters dealing with the illustrative selection of *pragmatic* theorists of participatory democracy, examines the contribution of Chantal Mouffe. Again the thread of an action-based politics finds expression here, this time in the form of 'discourse'. In *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy*, written with Ernesto Laclau, Mouffe identifies her work as contributing to a post-marxist perspective.⁷² Mouffe has continued to develop the concept of 'radical democracy', which has been closely associated with the emergence of new social movements and identity politics. She seeks to re-claim what she sees as 'the logic of contingency' in Marx's theory. Through this concept she foregrounds agonism, which she believes is an inevitable and permanent aspect of all human social relations.⁷³ Agonism involves the necessary presence of boundaries *between* social agents, thus identity is formed through a relationship, a discourse, of contestation with other social agents. Mouffe forcefully rejects the notion that these discourses might indicate an underlying reality, as the discourses themselves *make up* the social world. All systems of social relations are constantly altered by political actions, and are for Mouffe most definitely not manifestations of underlying essences.

This makes possible the idea of multiple positions and identities of agents of social change. Democracy therefore must occupy multiple sites and be elaborated by multiple agents, not merely a vanguard party or a world historical working-class.⁷⁴ Participatory democracy is here radical in that it breaks out of electoral representation and

⁷² Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (London: Verso, 1992).

reductionist/determinist struggle, but expands and deepens into identity struggles, citizenship rights, collective decision-making in the workplace, and ecological issues, etc. It is premised on a restless demand for identity formation in an "empty space of power".⁷⁵ Many groups can come together in common cause in a commitment to extend the 'democratic imaginary', or as Dewey would have it, to come to share a democratic faith. Thus in Mouffe's work there is at least an implicit set of aims and values which can bind people together which we share as human beings, over and above our pursuit of agonistic exceptionalism.

A critical realist perspective

In the final chapter I argue that a critical realist perspective makes a compelling case for an explicit ontological foundation for participatory democracy. The positions of the thinkers under review will be presented, concentrating specifically on how they justify participatory democracy and what elements of human nature the preceding chapters have uncovered. These results will be presented in the form of a spectrum, ranging from extreme pragmatic sceptical justification to the most open affirmation of essentialism. In the second section of this concluding chapter I investigate the ways in which critical realism might be adapted to move towards the foundations upon which a theory of participatory democracy could be developed. Existing theories of democracy tend to avoid or play-down how democracy can contribute to the development of individual and communal identities and the realisation of the self. These factors are, however, essential and mutually supporting strengths of democracy, and it is my contention that the value of a democracy of participation is both an external *and* internal concern of individual human being. As such critical realism appears to offer a nuanced awareness of both ontology, and of epistemological relativism which can help us theorise this dual benefit of participatory democracy.

⁷⁵ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985).

The critical realist perspective, as developed initially by Bhaskar and Archer, has not previously been applied to democratic theory, but was primarily developed as a philosophy of scientific methodology.⁷⁶ It seeks to provide an ontological and an epistemological framework which can unearth enduring social structures, whilst also appreciating the cultural and discursive aspect of transitory human phenomena which more essentialist accounts underplay. It offers a philosophy which can show why both the pragmatic and the essentialist justifications of participatory democracy remain only partially successful, but why each nevertheless alerts us to explanatory possibilities neglected in the other. All philosophies, cognitive discourses, and practical activities presuppose a realism of one kind or another, and to be possible at all every theory of knowledge presupposes a theory of what the world is like - an ontology.⁷⁷ The question is not whether particular theorists are realists, but what kind of realist they are. We can be essentialists, empirical realists, or linguistic realists.⁷⁸ Critical realism differs from alternative overt and covert realisms in two distinct areas.

Firstly, according to critical realism the world is composed not only of events, states of affairs, experiences, impressions, and discourses, but also of underlying structures, powers, and tendencies that exist whether or not they are known through experience and/or discourse. For critical realists this demands the reintroduction of ontology to considerations of the possibility of knowledge. The underlying reality provides the *conditions of possibility* for events, perceived and/or experienced phenomena. According to critical realists, both empirical and linguistic realists collapse what are, in

⁷⁶ Roy Bhaskar, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 2nd ed. (Brighton: Harvester, 1978), Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London: Verso, 1986). Margaret A. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Margaret A. Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷⁷ Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality* (London: Verso, 1989), 2.

⁷⁸ Archer, *Being Human.*, 5.

effect, distinct levels of reality into one.⁷⁹ Both the underlying reality that makes experience possible and the cause of events that are not experienced or articulated are reduced to what can be empirically grasped or can become discursive objects.

Secondly, these different levels may not map directly onto each other. Although the underlying level of reality may possess certain powers, tendencies or mechanisms these are not always manifest in experience. The conception critical realists are proposing is that of a world composed, in part, of complex things, including systems and complexly structured situations, that by virtue of their structures possess powers, potentials, and capacities to act in certain ways even if those capacities are not always realized. The world on this view consists of more than the actual cause of discrete events and experiences, and/or our discourses about them. Science is thus not a deductive form of inquiry that hunts for constant conjunctions of events, but a form of inquiry by which the structures, powers, and tendencies that shape how events unfold can be identified. An explanation will entail providing an account of those structures, powers and tendencies that have contributed to, or facilitated, some already identified phenomenon of interest.

For this thesis the central phenomena of interest are human subjects, and by what mechanisms or powers they come to define themselves, their chosen functions of will, and their social environment. In effect, by looking for a justification of participatory democracy I am also looking for the ontology which underpins human being and growth. Importantly the mode of inference implied by critical realism is neither deductive nor inductive, but *retroductive*. This involves the use of metaphor or analogy in the construction of an explanation for some experienced, but not directly observable, phenomena. These analogies or metaphors will enable the production of a different thing, model, or condition which if it acted in the way imagined would account for the phenomena in question. Thus although we cannot have direct access to human nature, whatever it

⁷⁹ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 56.

might be, we can describe the conditions of the world and the interaction of the human agents in the world, and from these descriptions draw analogous or metaphorical descriptions of what might be the ontological forces driving those actual phenomena.

The scientific endeavour cannot be assumed to ever come to an end, for as one phenomenon is explained by a deeper level, analogy or metaphor, that deeper level will become a new phenomenon to be investigated. Equally, as deeper layers are revealed and understood, the knowledge we gain of them may necessitate that we revise our understandings of the original phenomenon. Science is seen to proceed through a constant spiral of discovery and understanding,⁸⁰ further discovery, and revision, and hopefully more adequate understanding. It should also be observed that on this view there can be no such thing as 'the' scientific method. A diversity of approaches will come to be seen as appropriate to the diversity of the structured and differentiated reality revealed. The parallels with a plurality of participatory democratic formations, associations and approaches present in all our illustrative theorists in different extents and forms, will be obvious.

The 'intransitive' dimension to science, the domain of the objects of scientific knowledge - broadly 'the ontological' - which is separate from those that would come to have knowledge of it, is only one side of the equation. While critical realism rejects, as do pragmatists and post-structuralists or post-modernists, the idea that this deeper level of reality is directly open to experience, another dimension to science becomes necessary in order to make sense of *knowledge production*. This will come about through a *transformation* of already existing knowledges, which are *transitive* objects; such as theories, paradigms, facts, linguistic conventions and discourses, culture, and symbolic gestures, etc. Knowledge is unavoidably a social product, actively produced through a continual engagement, or interaction, with its (intransitive) object. That is to say, different theories can

⁸⁰ A "theory practice helix" in Bhaskar's words. Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 205.

construe the same unchanging world in radically different ways. It is knowledge, nonetheless of an independently existing reality.

In summary; critical realism is committed to *ontological realism* - that there is a reality, which is differentiated, structured, and layered, and independent of mind; to *epistemological relativism* - that all beliefs are socially produced and hence potentially fallible; and to *judgmental rationality* - that in principle it is still possible to provide justifiable grounds for preferring one theory over another. In the social world, however, are social phenomena not radically different from the world of the natural sciences? The specific material structure of the social world - its institutions, social relations, and practices - are dependent upon social meanings in numerous ways. Accordingly the study of the social world requires that the subject become part of its object. An essential critical component thus enters into social science. Any given social object will therefore necessarily be constituted by, amongst other things, an array of practices themselves concept-dependent. Thus the critical realist argument is that if it can be shown that a belief is false and that holding this belief is causally necessary for the preservation of the status quo - in short, that the belief is ideological - then it follows that, subject to the subtle interaction of an agent's self-beliefs and resources, that belief should be superseded by one more fitted to the newer, fuller knowledge. The institutions supporting that false, ideological belief can therefore be rationally critiqued, and should be transformed into ones serving truer, human, ends. This requires a very full notion of causal necessity - of human nature, sanity, health, and well-being - and of the different types of cause involved in true and false beliefs. The causal needs or mechanisms of capitalism or representative democracy, for instance, are different to the causal needs and mechanisms of human being.

Democracy in its most basic form is only relevant at all as a means of taking some control of personal and communal destiny. To do this effectively the people concerned must be possessed of knowledge of their desires and possibilities, and of the potentials of the available political structures. Reliable knowledge is key to even the most basic democracy, and will thus assist the progress of democratic practice

along its spectrum towards its fullest realisation. In these deeper, broader, and more advanced forms of democracy communities and individuals will also be on a progress to a fuller and deeper knowledge of the tenor of their needs, of the underlying powers driving themselves and their structures, and the relative consonance or dissonance between the two. Critical realist philosophy offers both an ontological account of reality and a methodological approach to bring knowledge closer to a full encounter with that ontological reality. Both these strengths are of the deepest significance to the theory and practice of participatory democracy.

Originality

This thesis presents an original contribution to political theory on two fronts. It is the first to look at the philosophical justifications of participatory democracy of these particular key theorists. This is doubly significant in that often these justifications remain deeply implicit. Secondly, this thesis is the first to employ the tools of a critical realist perspective to argue for a 'thick' conceptualisation of human nature to justify participatory democracy.

Chapter 2 - John Dewey

The contribution of John Dewey to participatory democratic theory begins the analysis of what I have called a pragmatic sceptical basis of justification. This refers to a body of theoretical work which is doubtful or even incredulous towards essential or foundational grounds on which to base any democratic reconstruction or prescription.¹ This doubt is particularly directed towards any conceptualisation of human nature. As an identifiable tendency in participatory democratic theory, it links Anglo-American and continental philosophy through a lineage extending from the pragmatism of Dewey, through Benjamin Barber's communitarianism, to the work of Mouffe which is informed by Nietzsche, the later Wittgenstein, and Derrida.² This tendency in participatory democratic theory argues for the recovery of a radical democratic tradition by emphasising that the truth about the best course of action cannot be known *a priori* with any certainty. It provides for a continually renewing impetus in the expansion of political participation, so that every person's opinion has an equal claim to consideration. Political participation enables us to fashion modes of living in the world that are congruent with our uncertainties because they are dependent upon mutual agreement rather than being in harmony with some transcendent essence. These theories encounter a problem, however, in that this thoroughgoing scepticism seems to negate itself, severing the link between our knowledge claims and the rationality of participatory democratic political institutions. Twentieth-century philosophers of participatory democracy that pursue this pragmatic scepticism have, for the most part, opted for some form of blunted

¹ I rely on Aryeh Botwinick's study (Aryeh Botwinick, *Skepticism and Political Participation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), for much of the thrust of the following paragraph.

² Anthony Reynolds, "Forgetting Rhetoric: On the Ars Oblivionalis of Pragmatism," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2003).

scepticism. Dewey for instance, modifies scepticism in a pragmatic search for a description and prescription for conduct through what he called the 'principle of right method'.³

The structure of this chapter will take the following form: from an initial investigation of Dewey's standing as a major public philosopher, of the influences on his work and of his influence, I proceed to examine Dewey's pragmatism in relation to pragmatism generally. This leads to an analysis of his particular commitment to participatory democracy as a form of scientific enquiry. Next the Deweyian conception of human nature is pursued, firstly through an examination of the relationship of the State to individuals, and then through an analysis of Dewey's conception of individual 'growth'. I will also consider the associated role of Dewey's ethics in participatory democracy theory. I then conclude with some critical realist reflections on the concrete effects these factors have for Dewey's descriptive and normative analysis of democracy.

Dewey as the public philosopher of democracy

Dewey was a major figure in the development of pragmatic philosophy, which emerged from nineteenth-century idealism.⁴ Dewey's early influences were the British idealists, T.H. Green, Bradley, and particularly Loetz. The transcendentalism of Emerson was also a continuing inspiration to this thought. As a graduate student at Johns Hopkins he was highly impressed by the Hegelian, G.S. Morris. He was also deeply interested in psychology and was convinced of its close connection with philosophy. The publication of William James' *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890 reconfirmed this conviction and contributed to the development of his thought in pragmatic directions.

³ John Dewey, "Ethics 2nd Ed.," ([1932]), LW7.68, 276.

⁴ Welchman is particularly good for the influence of Hegel on Dewey, Jennifer Welchman, *Dewey's Ethical Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995). Also generally useful is Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey, Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1991).

He moved to the University of Chicago, drawn by a newly instituted course in pedagogy in the department of philosophy and psychology. From here he began both his long association with G.H. Mead, and his active role in reshaping American education. In 1928 he was invited to Soviet Russia to observe their experiments in education and was duly impressed. His public expressions of this earned him the nicknames 'Bolshevik' and 'red Dewey' in the press, while his later chairing of the tribunal into Stalin's accusations against Trotsky earned him the reputation as a reactionary or Trotskyite in left-wing circles.

His growing interest in the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution and its application to psychological thinking led him to reconsider Hegelian theory. He later tried, but never fully succeeded, to abandon Hegelian notions of ideas as mirroring the rational order of the universe, materially realised through a dialectical process.⁵ In his particular development of pragmatism, Dewey attempted to provide a reformulated statement of its leading ideas in his concept of 'instrumentalism', of pragmatism as an *instrumental* or *experimental* theory of knowledge.⁶ This instrumental interpretation of reasoning holds that truth is a tool used by human beings to solve problems, and that as those problems change so must the nature of truth.⁷ Dewey's theory of reality held that nature as encountered in scientific and ordinary *experience* is the only reality it makes any sense to consider. Human life is a product of nature which finds both

⁵ "Nevertheless I should never think of ignoring, much less denying, what an astute critic occasionally refers to as a novel discovery - that acquaintance with Hegel has left a permanent deposit in my thinking." (all references to Dewey's work refer to *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, published between 1967 and 1990 in thirty seven volumes. Standard references to John Dewey's work are to the critical (print) edition, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991), and published in three series as *The Early Works* (EW), *The Middle Works* (MW) and *The Later Works* (LW). Each reference is identified by its original title and followed by volume and page number. Thus 'Appreciation and Cultivation' [1931] LW6.112," for example, refers to the essay 'Appreciation and Cultivation' originally published in 1931, which appears in *The Later Works*, volume 6, from page 112.)

⁶ H. S. Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 169-74.

its meaning and its goal in the here-and-now. Consequently this philosophy insists that only that which is directly experienced can be meaningfully considered. This tactic, however, excludes precisely those elements which impinge on social and political situations most pervasively. For, in democratically practical deliberations, those varieties of content most important are often those *external* to direct, immediate experience.

Dewey's political philosophy has prompted a steady flow of literature in recent years. A great deal of the credit for the revival of interest in Dewey must be given to the work of Rorty, especially *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and *The Consequences of Pragmatism*.⁸ Rorty looks back to Dewey's major works to find pre-echoes of modern criticisms of logical positivism, analytic philosophy and positivist science. As part of an American drive to claim a place in the evolution of contemporary post-modern thought, Dewey and pragmatism generally, have served as a useful starting point. In discussion of theoretical justifications for participatory democracy, however, Dewey serves a less partisan purpose. He stood throughout his career, covering the first half of the twentieth century, as a firm and committed defender and advocate of a deep, participatory form of democracy. Whether it be on the basis of what commentators have variously interpreted as; a "teleological ethics of self-realisation";⁹ participatory democracy as a moral ideal;¹⁰ as "the precondition for the application of intelligence to social problems" in the absence of a final answer to the question 'How should we live?';¹¹ or reflexive co-operation,¹² Dewey has provided an extensive literature in which to ground justifications for deeper forms of democratic practice. As

⁸ Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁹ Matthew Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).

¹⁰ David Fott, *John Dewey: America's Philosopher of Democracy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 64-67.

¹¹ Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 216.

¹² Axel Honneth, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today," *Political Theory* 26, no. 6 December (1998).

can be seen, a wide diversity of approach can be detected in Dewey's huge output. This is indicative of his restless imaginative curiosity. Although the major thrust of his thought is towards pragmatic scepticism, as I will show, this impatient curiosity draws him constantly towards metaphysical concepts such as a 'teleological ethics of self-realisation', without him ever fully embracing them.¹³

Dewey's pragmatism in relation to pragmatism generally

Pragmatism emerged as a philosophical system at the end of the nineteenth-century, and is often identified as a theory of meaning, first stated by Charles Sanders Peirce in the 1870s and revised as a theory of truth in 1898 by William James.¹⁴ It initially originated in an idealist response to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in the year of Dewey's birth. Peirce himself was guided by ideas he found in Kant, principally from his study of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, particularly the idea that "access to the meanings of concepts is guided only through traffic with concepts."¹⁵ Meaning, as expressed in formulas prescribing *kinds* of operations and results, forms and rules of actions, is an idea directly linked to Kant, and the word 'pragmatism' was a translation of Kant's *pragmatische*. Here its meaning is taken, not as 'practical', but in the sense of empirical or experimental.¹⁶ In Pragmatism, then, rationalist accounts of the universe and of human goals were replaced with ideas of the growth and development of techniques in a universe of change and adaptation. It emphasised the particular variations and struggles of life in adapting to environmental conditions.¹⁷ For the pragmatist the truth, or more precisely, meaning of a proposal is gauged by its

¹³ John Dewey, "The New Psychology," ([1884]), EW1.60.

¹⁴ Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 59-64.

correspondence with experimental results and by its practical consequences. Pragmatists therefore believe that truth is modified as actions are fitted to purpose. 'Truth' therefore becomes temporally and spatially relative, as well as relative to the purpose of inquiry.

While others have attempted an overarching, coherent characterisation of pragmatism as the philosophy of the American mind,¹⁸ there seem to be fundamental divergences beneath the complimentary surface of exchanges between James and Dewey.¹⁹ His development as the 'official American philosopher of democracy' has burdened his work with accusations of under-labourer to external, historical, and economic forces, or that he was the provider of philosophical rigidity for the emerging industrial capitalist class, because his "epistemological conclusions dovetailed with Taylor's assumptions".²⁰ Claims that he was the American philosopher laureate of democracy may be exaggerated, but he certainly was a very public figure. It may be the case that his popularity was due to the utility which his ideas had to the service of the emergent capitalist/industrial development in America as the nineteenth-century turned into the twentieth. Dewey's initial Hegelian idealism, however, was of less utility and he soon came to modify this stance to try and purge himself of the "Hegelian bacillus".²¹ He was vigorously opposed to all things Marxist, at least in part as a consequence of Communist agitation in the United States and the

¹⁸ Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt against Formalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

¹⁹ Brian Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 23.

²⁰ These assumptions are those of Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). See Franklin D. Becker and Fritz Steele, *Workplace by Design: Mapping the High-Performance Workscape* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), John Sheldrake, *Management Theory: From Taylorism to Japanization*, 1st ed. (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1997). For the accusations against Dewey's work see R. Jeffrey Lustig, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern American Political Theory, 1890-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 155, George Novack, *Pragmatism V's Marxism: An Appraisal of John Dewey's Philosophy* (New York: Pathfinder, 1975), Harry Kohlsaas Wells, *Pragmatism, Philosophy of Imperialism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954).

²¹ Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 13-32.

tendencies of Stalin's Soviet Russia.²² Dewey was, however, no reactionary, but a radical social liberal who was extremely active in trade union activity. His support, together with G.H. Mead, of Jane Addams' Hull House social reform settlement in Chicago was also public and substantial.²³ Dewey was a founder member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union. An early member of the Socialist Party, Dewey later joined the Progressive Party and supported Robert La Follette in his attempts to become President. Dewey also joined the League for Independent Political Action, which promoted alternatives to a capitalist system they considered to be obsolete and cruel.²⁴

There were also philosophical grounds for his objection to Marxism, particularly what he came to see as a "schematism" of form, and a mechanical dialectical setting.²⁵ Dewey was actually rejecting a reading of Engels-as-Marx, and his knowledge of the works of Marx appears to be very limited.²⁶ In his concern for the alienating aspects of a competitive market economy, and the immiserating consequences of extremes of wealth and poverty, on the surface he would appear to have some affinities with Marx. There are passages

²² John Dewey, "Freedom and Culture," in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1924-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, [1939]), LW13.116-35.

²³ In the early days of Hull House its founders, Jane Addams and Ellen Starr, were influenced by the Christian Socialism that had inspired the creation of Toynbee Hall, in London's East End. The women of Hull House were also inspired by the ideas of William Morris and John Ruskin. The settlement continues to be involved in social reform to this day. See Mary Jo Deegan, *Race, Hull-House, and the University of Chicago: A New Conscience against Ancient Evils* (Westport, Conn. ; London: Praeger, 2002), Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

²⁴ Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922*.

²⁵ John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," ([1930]), LW5:154.

²⁶ James Campbell, "Dewey's Understanding of Marx and Marxism," in *Context over Foundation; Dewey and Marx*, ed. William J. Gavin (D. Reidel: Dordrecht, Holland, 1988), James Farr, "Engels, Dewey, and the Reception of Marxism in America," in *Engels after Marx*, ed. Manfred B. Steger and Terrell Carver (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 262.

in *Individualisms, Old and New* which could have come from *Capital vol III*,

There are now, it is estimated, eight billions of surplus savings a year, and the amount is increasing. Where is this capital to find its outlet? Diversion into the stock market gives temporary relief, but the resulting inflation is a "cure" which creates a new disease. If it goes into the expansion of industrial plants, how long will it be before they, too, "overproduce"?²⁷

He also observed that because financial and industrial power, organised into corporations, turns economic advantage to privilege the few, economic determinism was a fact not a theory.²⁸ His student, Sidney Hook, who was studying at the Marx-Engels Archive in Moscow and was amongst the first American scholars to see the source materials becoming available there, repeatedly urged Dewey to recognise the similarities of his work to Marx's.²⁹ He insisted in a letter to Dewey in 1929 that Marx's work was no more a system than was pragmatism.³⁰ Hook actually hoped to bring about a synthesis of Marx and Dewey, but Dewey was thoroughly implacable in his opposition to Marxism, arguing that the automatic working of historical forces was an entirely false conception of the relation of the past to the present and its future.³¹ Dewey saw clearly enough the problems of a monocausal Second International Marxism, and held that while it could not be denied that coercion and oppression on a

²⁷ John Dewey, "Individualism, Old and New," ([1930]), LW5.94. For Marx, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 37: *Capital*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998), Chpt. XXX.

²⁸ Dewey, "Individualism, Old and New," LW5.97, 99.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, LW5.90. "I do not know enough about Marx to enter into the discussion concerning his philosophy." See also Farr, "Engels, Dewey, and the Reception of Marxism in America.", Peter T. Manicas, "Philosophy and Politics: A Historical Approach to Marx and Dewey," in *Context over Foundation; Dewey and Marx*, ed. William J. Gavin (Dordrecht, Holland.: D. Reidel., 1988).

³⁰ Letter to John Dewey, 9 January, 1929. Dewey Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois Library, quoted in Farr, "Engels, Dewey, and the Reception of Marxism in America," 272.

³¹ John Dewey, "Social Change and Its Human Direction," ([1930]), LW5.367.

large scale existed, these things were not the product of science and technology, but of the perpetuation of old institutions untouched by scientific method.³² Although Dewey's own scientific method emphasises plurality of approach and the utilisation of creative intelligence, his optimism for an "interplay of tendencies",³³ without an appreciation of enduring real ontological levels of structure, render his optimism naive. How could "a movement toward a mean, ... an achievement of splendor" occur when any conception of *the public* was already lost, as he saw so clearly in 1929, in a capitalist society that left financial and industrial power with a free hand?³⁴

There is an element of multi-layered, interdependent structure to Dewey's democratic thought which goes some way to counter the 'received view' of Dewey's political theory as a merely instrumental method, locked-into given social, political, educational, and economic conditions. For Dewey, ethics and political thought are interdependent.³⁵ The relative inattendance to Dewey's moral theory is regrettable, and as Welchman claims, recent trends in naturalising ethics ought to look back to what is arguably the most original naturalistic moral theory produced in the twentieth century.³⁶ Many of the transitions in Dewey's instrumental methodology, his educational, and democratic thinking, for instance, were pushed into motion by developments in his ethical thought. The accusations of the 'received view' of Dewey as purely instrumental tend to emphasise his interest in science and experimentation as destructive of his early Hegelian idealism.³⁷ His conception of science, however, was such that it could not erode completely his idealism.³⁸ The partial knowledges of the concrete sciences were for Dewey

³² John Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," ([1935]), LW11.58.

³³ Dewey, "Freedom & Culture," LW13.94.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, LW13.130.

³⁵ Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, 17.

³⁶ Welchman, *Dewey's Ethical Thought*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

ultimately subsumed under the abstract science that is philosophy.³⁹ What concerns us here, however, is the extent to which the instrumental and the ethical, or the concrete and the abstract elements have ascendance over the other. Is he able to adequately resolve the solipsistic paradox at the heart of his participatory democratic vision, in attempting a radical reconstruction of the foundations of democratic thought?

We may, for instance, temper the view of Dewey as a purely instrumental thinker through examination of his critical description of democracy, as an account and a method for discerning the gap between present conditions and credible democratic ideals. Dewey's political and ethical theories can be seen as normative theories defined, in Festenstein's words, by a teleological ethic of self-realisation or growth which recognises an objective character to human freedom and its dependence on a parity between environment and human wants.⁴⁰ This parity or congruity can only be achieved through a profound and ongoing engaged democratic activity.⁴¹ Thus Dewey is moved to construct a moral theory based on the essential necessity of 'growth' to all of being, and particularly of human being. The concepts of growth in this moral context provides an assize, a critical tool with which to test social and political institutions.⁴² While this moral framework presents a challenge which parries some criticisms of the received view, it does not entirely vindicate Dewey's champions. Festenstein, for instance, acknowledges that there are instabilities in Dewey's 'moral framework' which suggest his supporters must either skate rather tenderly around part of his thought, or pursue a substantial reconstruction of the foundations of Dewey's democratic thought.⁴³

³⁹ John Dewey, "Psychology as Philosophic Method," ([1886]), EW1.144, John Dewey, "Reconstruction in Philosophy," ([1921]), MW12.92-95.

⁴⁰ Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, 22.

⁴¹ John Dewey, "Human Nature and Conduct," ([1922]), MW14.210.

⁴² John Dewey, "Ethics," ([1908]), MW5.431.

⁴³ Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, 23.

Festenstein himself attempts just such a radical reconstruction with less than convincing results. Not only is it the case that instabilities in Dewey's framework are problematic, but the emphasis in his instrumentalism on radical empirical epistemology and on 'contingency' have a destabilising effect on both his ethical and political project. It results in a participatory democracy which is bound up within process and procedure, unable to fully break out into critical evaluation of outcomes and into practical means of breaking through those impediments to fully human flourishing. The means and ends of democracy are integrated in a contextually, ethically, and procedurally sensitive theory. In relying, however, on a 'thin' naturalistic ontology Dewey is unable to fully imagine those absences and structures which are not immediately visible, but which are nonetheless real and serve to block and pervert human growth.

Dewey and participatory democracy

Dewey's is a comprehensive and deeply worked through theory of democracy, with a number of approaches to justifying participatory forms of democracy, as an *adjunct* to representative democracy. Both Ryan and Westbrook, however, lament the quality of Dewey's forays into concrete suggestions. Apart from a few very general calls for broadening the sites of democracy, there is, they claim, disappointingly little depth to these moments in Dewey's writings, which are at best interesting but sketchy moments, anticlimaxes absurdly at odds with their elevated origins in his philosophy.⁴⁴ These claims seem puzzling given his active political life *and* the numerous concrete suggestions in his work.

In expressing "the first great demand of a better social order", after the first world war, for instance, Dewey suggests a new *individual* right - the right to work.⁴⁵ As in *The Public and its Problems* later on, Dewey understands the establishment of the

⁴⁴ Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*, 310, Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 317-18.

⁴⁵ John Dewey, "Internal Social Reorganization after the War," ([1918]), M11.83.

public and democratic participation to be the process, an instrument, for protecting people from the adverse consequences of the private activity of others.⁴⁶ His is a theory of civil society as a buffer between private individuals and the state. Although an important resource in this defence, a right to work and a basic sufficient standard of living would not fulfil all the resource needs for socially re-organising the indirect consequences of the actions of others. They would only be external, infrequently applicable, and tangential resources to apply to their lives. What is needed is more participation, responsibility, and power, over more areas of their lives. Dewey also issues a call for industrial democracy, for self-control over the social and economic circumstances of the lives of working people.⁴⁷ Dewey's democratic idea is fundamentally an idea of positive rather than negative freedom, and it must embrace industrial as well as civil and political forms.⁴⁸ It is the idea of democracy as a way of life, a democratic way of being, a *social idea*, or faith that propels Dewey.

As part of the liberal debate about freedom, Dewey insisted that the woeful negative consequences of laissez-faire economic and political regimes needed to be replaced with intelligent social action. His political vision was a re-invigorated, reconstituted liberalism, premised on individual flourishing.⁴⁹ Freedom is identified with individuality as an end, and a socialised democratic economy as the means. After casting his eye over the conditions which prevailed after the First World War, and during the New Deal era, the needs of these peculiar situations led Dewey to increasingly radical conclusions. The shibboleths of laissez-faire liberalism had, he came

⁴⁶ Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.243-46.

⁴⁷ John Dewey, "What Are We Fighting For?," ([1918]), M11.105.

⁴⁸ John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy," ([1888]), EW1.246.

⁴⁹ Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," LW11.63. Also, "Liberty is that secure release and fulfilment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: Liberty... thought of as independence of social ties ... ends in dissolution and anarchy." Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.329.

to believe, become increasingly inadequate and destructive of human flourishing.⁵⁰ This move to a social idea of democratic and economic arrangements found voice in 1929 when Dewey proclaimed that private "pecuniary success" was no longer the yardstick by which industry should be measured. It should instead be judged by its effect on the life experience of both worker and consumer.⁵¹ Positive freedom could only be effectively promoted and protected through public intervention in social and economic affairs.⁵² In the circumstances this added-up to a call for social, although not socialist, democracy, and for a planning rather than a planned economy.⁵³ Although the New Deal contained much that was radical at the time he was nevertheless very critical of it, for "just messing around ... doing a little of this and a little of that in the hope that things might improve."⁵⁴ In this he seems to be moving towards a much more rational approach to reform that would sit well with the received view of pragmatism, and indeed with the general thrust of his instrumental approach. He seems to have been seizing the openness of the times to push for still more radical change. The problems he identified at this time were hardly to go away, however, and what he suggested here would be welcome contributions to human emancipation in other times. He proposed, in 1935, the nationalisation of public utilities, transport, communications and even banking, as well as a huge programme of public works and housing, for instance.⁵⁵ These were, and are, moves which could be seen as addressing enduring human and social concerns.

⁵⁰ Dewey, "Freedom & Culture," LW13.150, Dewey, "Internal Social Reorganization after the War," MW11.78.

⁵¹ Dewey, "Individualism, Old and New," LW5.106.

⁵² Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," LW11.63-64.

⁵³ John Dewey, "Unity and Progress," ([1933]), LW9.72.

⁵⁴ John Dewey, "Future of Liberalism," ([1935]), LW11.292-3.

⁵⁵ Dewey, "Individualism, Old and New," LW5.104-05, Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action," LW11.61-62, John Dewey, "Socialisation of Ground Rent," ([1935]), LW11.256-57, Dewey, "Unity and Progress," LW9.72.

I have dwelt on these sites where a democratic society can be reformed not solely for their importance in defining the self, in helping to create, reflexively and co-operatively, the individual, but because of the central importance Dewey places on sociability and organised transmission of public goods as a democratic element. These sites are, however, explicitly separate from the representative state, and Dewey's main concern was with 'democratic faith', his commitment to democracy as a social ideal which would act as a bridging ethic between individuals, their communities and interests, and the state.

Democracy as social ideal

The deep substance of Dewey's *social idea* is crucial; can it support self-realisation? Is it a 'full' enough concept for its purpose, or is it a rather shallow and banal concept? It is, firstly, important to distinguish between Dewey's *political democracy* and *democracy as a social ideal*.⁵⁶ For Dewey, participatory democracy is not only, or merely, a political form. Direct participation of democratically minded citizens and a more participatory form of representative democratic political institution were mutually enhancing forms. Political democracy can only be effectively maintained where democracy is both social and moral in form.⁵⁷ Although Dewey held that democratic government should continue to include accountable officers, the logic of his political and ethical theory pointed to a government which was also deeply reliant on agencies of direct democracy.⁵⁸ His aim was the transformation of associated living into the *Great Community*, through the instrumentalities of scientific technology and the arts, but premised on the ideal of a participatory social life.

⁵⁶ John Dewey, "The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy," ([1916]), MW10.137-38, Matthew Festenstein, "The Ties of Communication: Dewey on Ideal and Political Democracy," *History of Political Thought* 18, no. 1 Spring (1997).

⁵⁷ Dewey, "The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy," MW10.138.

⁵⁸ Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, 317.

The difference between the liberal *compromise of interests* and the deliberative *construction of interests* forms a central pivot of this ideal. Dewey's idea of democracy is a broader and deeper idea than can be embodied in the state, even at its best. To be realized fully, democracy must affect all modes of human association, the family, education, industry, and religion.⁵⁹ Although he is firmly committed to liberal representative democracy, he is also committed to a *democratic faith*, to participatory democracy as a social form ensuring the health, relevance, and dynamic of the representative state. It would be trite to say that the cure for a bad democracy is more democracy, if all this means is adding more institutional form on top of the existing apparatus. More elections or more assemblies will not make a better democracy by themselves. It is democracy as *social idea* which pushes, creates, and provides the ethical motivation to a democracy which must be reinvigorated. This social idea indicates the need to employ the deep meaning of the social as a critique and template for thoroughgoing political reform.⁶⁰ In this his faith offers a procedural vision of a rationally communicative public realm informing the actions of and legitimating the state. At the same time Dewey's social ideal serves to provide the conditions of individual growth and self-realisation.

There is, however, a tension between the *idea* of the state and the *social idea* of democracy. For Dewey, 'idea' has no place in accounting for the state. The very act of naming petrifies our attention, and diverts our concentration from action. The social idea, however, is called upon to provide a foundation for "political manifestations."⁶¹ We must remain aware of Dewey's empirical fact-base for all meaning and action, a base which does not allow ideas to penetrate very far into descriptions of political action. Dewey insists that any assumption that theory, 'idea', itself generates the governmental practices of the democratic state be abandoned, "the idea has influenced the concrete political movement, but it has not

⁵⁹ Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.325.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., LW2.241.

caused it.”⁶² This seems rather to confuse matters, because it is unclear which idea he is referring to. Granted, a democratic faith in the idea of society as a cohering focus is important, but is it *the* idea which influences concrete political institutions? Surely political democracy as a system of government is an idea. Dewey would probably respond that this is not an idea but an observable fact, an empirical reality only “influenced” by *the*, extrinsic, idea. It cannot be left to stand that the state, that government, is not inhabited by ideas. Of course it contains and represents ideas, and particularly ideas about the potentials of the human beings which it stands over. Dewey is wary of the pervasive hubris which can accrete to the state, but there is little indication of how a faith in his ‘thin’ social ideal of democracy could hope to penetrate it.⁶³

The nature of ‘The State’

In *The Public and its Problems* Dewey traces the development of the public, an embodiment of the sum of individual activity in separate and joint growth. This politically embodied realisation brings into being the state, and democratically indicates the continuing necessity for representative democracy. In examining human acts and their consequences Dewey discerns two types of actions. These are the standard liberal distinctions between the public and the private, which however, are not completely incommensurable and alien to each other. Dewey acknowledges some influence of one upon the other.⁶⁴ The first type of actions are those acts which have direct consequences to those concerned, and those which have indirect consequences beyond those immediately concerned. With the recognition of indirect, possibly detrimental consequences, the state is formed to regulate those effects.

⁶² *Ibid.*, LW2.326.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, LW2.255.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, LW2.244.

Private acts are not necessarily anti-social, nor public ones socially useful. This is the source for the unavoidable need for representatives, since there are those affected indirectly by the activities of others, by activities in which they have no direct input or control, it is necessary that certain persons be set apart to represent them, and see to it that their interests and rights are protected. Dewey seems to have little problem with the 'apart-ness' of these representatives. They would appear to quite easily fulfil the role of neutral arbiter, ameliorator of divergent activities and consequences. All social behaviour and institutions arise, at base, from individual human beings. There is however a distinct characterisation, a meta-narrative, of human relationship here; that of the war of all against all.⁶⁵ Dewey sees only individuals and the 'facts' of individual behaviour, even where he sees their essential sociability. Action is informed by individual rational behaviour, as well as the other routine, impulsive, and unreflected acts of individuals. Rational behaviour itself is to be driven, however, by a *social idea* or the democratic faith.⁶⁶

A state is made up of individuals acting in office, representatively, not as *authors* of action, but through *authority* invested in it by an *active Public*. The private activity of individuals whose actions are informed by the social ideal of the democratic faith is the main driving force of Dewey's society. The state itself is a servant association which, while born of individual actions, represents their gathered interests in securing and obviating the consequences of those individual actions. The state is to be seen as a necessary, Hobbesian, agent, flowing from the consequences of individual behaviour.⁶⁷ It is "the public" as an abstract term, as separate from "the private". Consequence is thus the progenitor of the state. Dewey critiques various systematic accounts of the state which insist on earnestly looking for causal forces, as accounts which are

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, LW2.246.

⁶⁶ This has clear parallels with a later 'pragmatic sceptic', Chantal Mouffe, and her insistence on the hegemony of a democratic imaginary, as we shall see below.

⁶⁷ Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.247.

misleading.⁶⁸ While they are wilfully looking in the wrong place the conclusions resulting from that looking can only be arbitrary, and “‘interpretation’ runs wild.”⁶⁹ Thus causal agencies may be found in some metaphysical impulse attributable to nature. This would perhaps indicate an essence realised in a perfected society; or in the will of God; the meeting of individual wills in contract; an autonomous and transcendent will embodied in each as an inner universal demanding external expression, or in mind or reason itself as reality.⁷⁰ Of course Dewey cannot be accused of any wild interpretation in his instrumentalist, radical empiricist account. While the main facts of political action may vary widely in time and place, Dewey holds that they are not hidden even when they are complex. The facts of human behaviour are accessible to human observation. Problems occur, and we are misled, when pre-given causal explanations of what the state or the public is are used to interpret or describe those facts.⁷¹ Compare this with post-modernist contempt for the meta-narrative; and how this emphasis on empirical, observed plurality of appearance is directly linked to the possibility of political formation. Only existing “reality” can be referred to as a guide, and not imagination or creativity.

There is no mystery which needs to be explained to Dewey by any metaphysical constructions of the human imagination. Contradiction is a constant element in Dewey’s writing and is not to be feared or explained away. The diverse consequences of human action will always be unpredictable, and can only be pragmatically reacted to as the problems they initiate arise. If it were at all possible to account for contradiction and erase it, it could only be done by a metaphysical god which plainly is not to be found in human society. If there were to be any ‘mystery’ to confront the inquiring mind, it is simply that the universe is the kind of universe it is. If an observer were to remove themselves from the empirical to look down upon the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, LW2.241.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, LW2.248.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, LW2.248-49.

universe and take it all in, in a whole meta-narrative, they would still need to be connected to the universe in some sense, in order to communicate what they had seen, "we would still be just where we started, with the fact of connection as a fact to be accepted."⁷² Participatory democracy and science combined, could, however, bring us to knowledge of the immense and deep inter-connectedness if it were informed by an adequate conception of human being and its underlying ontological reality. Dewey recognises that political forms do persist, but insists that changes of industrial and technological advance, for instance, which provide pre-existing conditions and have fundamental effects on human interactions, are external to politics. They must just be put up with and reacted to in a post hoc fashion, *after* they have changed the conditions of associated behaviour. Change creates new conditions and a new public, and therefore a new human nature, which will need to re-create its political institutions, in response to the new consequences not of its choosing. This is Dewey's 'thin' naturalism, where there is nothing, and no need, to go outside of what naturally exists, what is here and now, to explain what there is.

The Public thus coalesced appoints authorised representatives to guard its interests. It will organise itself into a political form and become established as a government. The Public becomes a Political State. The complexion of that public, what nature of representative or agent, and how they function, however, are things that, claims Dewey, only history could reveal.⁷³ These things can only be known in retrospect, and history is less of a useful guide to the future than present action. There will be no two similar publics in time and place, and no form of state to be called the best, until all history ends. States will be formed from a continuing experimental process. Citizens, even if endowed with a fully functioning Deweyan democratic spirit, will continually be adrift on a sea of relativistic contingency.

⁷² *Ibid.*, LW2.250.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, LW2.256.

Human nature and democracy

Changing conceptions of human nature and the rise of democracy developed together. In identifying this tendency, Dewey observes a distinct relationship between conceptions human nature and the political forms which theory supports or justifies.⁷⁴ This is a common accusation against essentialism, particularly by proponents of the 'pragmatic sceptical' tendency. A revolutionary transformation of political and social arrangements took place in the eighteenth century, Dewey continues, with the move from natural law to natural rights, which substituted human nature for cosmic nature. He maintains that the need for change in contemporary democratic practice is based on an inadequate theory of human nature, a theory that has produced some progressive change, but which is now unable to cope with contemporary consequences.⁷⁵

Hobbes, Dewey declares, identifies categories of motive in human nature which do actually exist and which display great insight into the causes of social phenomena.⁷⁶ The conceptualisation itself of these qualities produces concrete political effects, and despite his earlier objections to the idea, Dewey is here identifying real effects of non-empirical phenomena. It is the effects of these non-scientific and partial elite 'objects' which he deplures. Science in itself is not inherently elitist to Dewey, and a merging of the scientific method, and ethos, with democracy is at the heart of his participatory democratic vision. The problem we are confronted with, however, is that these very qualities have been cited as causes of both disorder requiring a strong, perhaps even totalitarian state, *and* of effective efficient markets, occupational fitness, and general harmonious interdependence. The point being that both conceptions are guilty of the same fallacy, namely impulses or motives, or human nature, are neither good nor bad. All that is significant are the consequences

⁷⁴ Dewey, "Freedom & Culture," LW13.150.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, LW13.136.

⁷⁶ These motivational categories are "competition, diffidence or fear, and glory, resulting in action for gain, safety, reputation." *Ibid.*, LW13.140.

produced, the results of action. These results are dependent on the conditions in which they operate. Dewey is rejecting all unseen, and undemocratically engaged, determinants. They may well be there, but it is irrelevant to even consider their possibility, therefore even their effects, because they cannot be seen.

Dewey pushes these principles further. The circumstances in which humans operate, in which any element of human nature might find expression, are so diverse, so pluralised, both in time and in place, that these same elements might be both harmful or useful, dependent on circumstance.⁷⁷ In effect, competition or co-operation cannot be claimed as parts of human nature, as they are merely referents to social relations between individuals in any one particular time or place.⁷⁸ For Dewey, situated interaction is what forms and conditions 'human nature'. Although human nature as a term does seem to have some validity for Dewey, it is not quite as 'thin' a concept as this historically relativist idea might suggest. He observes that while certain needs in human nature are constant, because of the existing culture of science, morals, religion, art, industry, etc., the consequences they produce react back into the original components of human nature to shape them into new forms. These original components change, eventually, to such an extent that the total pattern of the original components is modified.⁷⁹ So Dewey is able to allow for a constant human nature, which is nevertheless under the influence of existing culture. It seems evident, however, from this that Dewey's conception here shows that while the surface pattern of human nature changes the component needs remain.

In constantly referencing back to consequences Dewey is giving dominance to agency, although he is by no means blind to the pervasive influence of structures.⁸⁰ In identifying the existing state of culture, science, morals, religion, art, industry, etc. as conditioners

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, LW13.141.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, LW13.142.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2:283.

of human nature, however, he limits the vocabulary of present and future action. He thus engages in what Archer has called 'downwards conflation'. It is as though the present and future are written on a typewriter with no vowels. Any reaction back onto the original components of human nature, to shape them into new forms, can only be partial.⁸¹ It is, however, the surface novelty of this partial transformation which can then be seen as consisting of the next era, or level of *original* components.⁸²

It is absurd to forget that human nature must have some foundation to rest on. It is equally foolish, however, claims Dewey, to imagine that what brings stability and security to one person will also serve as a foundation stone to others.⁸³ Human beings are *essentially* social animals, since they inhabit a cultural environment, over and above the physical one of weather and terrain. What people do and how they act are determined by cultural heredity, embeddedness in tradition, customs, institutions, and the purposes and beliefs they convey and inspire.⁸⁴ This cultural embeddedness results even in physical transformations of the body of the human animal, its effects are that profound.⁸⁵ As Dewey says, "To speak, to read, to exercise any art, industrial, fine or political, are instances of modifications wrought *within* the biological organism by the cultural environment."⁸⁶ Thus modification of organic existence by cultural elements makes a transition to intellectual existence, human behaviour is intellectually, not merely organically reactive. Human being is constantly renewing *itself*, individually, culturally, and as a species.

⁸¹ Dewey, "Freedom & Culture," LW13.142.

⁸² *Ibid.* emphasis added

⁸³ John Dewey, "Fundamentals," ([1923]), MW15:3-7.

⁸⁴ John Dewey, "Logic: The Theory of Inquiry," ([1938]), LW12.48.

⁸⁵ Graham Scambler, "Critical Realism, Sociology and Health Inequalities: Social Class as a Generative Mechanism and Its Media Enactment," *Journal of Critical Realism (incorporating Alethia)* 4, no. 1 (2001).

⁸⁶ Dewey, "Logic: The Theory of Inquiry," LW12.48.

Self-realisation and Growth

For Dewey democratic arrangements are good insofar as they help promote 'growth'. There is no telos of perfection in-itself, although for Dewey the aim of living is the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing, and refining of life itself.⁸⁷ This is consonant with the conception of discovering truth or meaning through experimental activity. From his early Hegelian beginnings, where self-realisation was a moral end,⁸⁸ to the second edition of *Ethics*, 'growth' was Dewey's most frequently employed term to describe the aim of human being. There is a clear link to Aristotelian virtue ethics in this, where "*the end is growth itself*"⁸⁹, and the concept of *growth* sustains the same fusion of psychological and moral evaluation which Dewey earlier expanded under the term self-realisation.⁹⁰ It is a development of the self which proceeds from the results of activity, but cannot be pursued single-mindedly in itself. A moral agent does not act so as to satisfy her own interest in growth, but in acting generously, in solidarity when it is called for, she grows. These intermediate acts of generosity, sacrifice, or solidarity must be ends in themselves, they cannot be means alone. An intermittent change of habit as a means is a waste of time, they must become habits of the heart rather than narcissistic pre-occupations of the self. With these intermediate acts, the most important act is the *next* one, not the kudos for the last.⁹¹ Each of these acts is to be pursued as

⁸⁷ Emerson was an enduring influence on Dewey. See LW2.372, Lewis S. Feuer, Introduction to *Essays* LW15.xxxiii. Dewey, "Reconstruction in Philosophy," MW12:181.

⁸⁸ Dewey, "Ethics," MW5.351.

⁸⁹ Dewey, "Ethics 2nd Ed.," LW7:306. Also Dewey, "Reconstruction in Philosophy," MW12.181. See John Dewey, "The Philosophy of Thomas Hill Green," ([1889]), EW3.31., & John Dewey, "Democracy and Education," ([1916]), MW9.364-65. for instance. For a critique of Aristotelian virtue for seeking perfection, see Dewey, "Human Nature and Conduct," MW14.122-23. and John Dewey, "Authority and Social Change," ([1935]), LW11.134. Welchman analyses the similarities of Dewey's ethic with both Aristotle and Hume, and finds a good deal of common ground with both of them in Dewey. Welchman, *Dewey's Ethical Thought*, 214-18.

⁹⁰ Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory*, 52.

⁹¹ Dewey, "Human Nature and Conduct," MW14:28.

perfectible. They are hypotheses to be revised in judgement of their effects on personal *and* communal growth, in the free circulation of experience.⁹² This still leaves growth, however, as a somewhat vague concept.

Six years earlier Dewey offered a somewhat fuller account in *Democracy and Education*. The free circulation of experience is essential for the Spinozistic concept of the human *conatus*, which is a tendency to persist, to seek to maintain itself as it is, as a distinct entity in a perpetually changing environment which produce have quite far-reaching effects on the 'actual' conditions of its existence.⁹³ Only in rational beings is this both a mental and physical process.⁹⁴ Dewey describes this, in 1916, as a *conatus essendi*.⁹⁵ The concept he uses more consistently for this process of essential self-maintenance, is *renewal*.⁹⁶ A stone, for instance, when hit will tend to maintain its form (unless struck hard enough!) but it cannot act to maintain itself, let alone absorb the blow as a factor in its own continuing existence.⁹⁷ If a living organism cannot absorb these outside forces and is crushed by their exercise, it loses its identity as a living thing. As a physical entity this result is obvious, but we can be crushed non-fatally and our identity as our particular form of living thing can be lost. Our essence may be destroyed though our outward form persists. This can be linked to the loss of engaged vitality in political apathy or various forms of self-destruction; narcotics, stimulants, breakdown in mental health, suicide etc.⁹⁸

⁹² Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.328.

⁹³ John Dewey, "Experience and Nature," ([1925]), LW1.162.

⁹⁴ Spinoza ethics 2, 21

⁹⁵ John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," ([1916]), MW10.7-8. see also Dewey, "Democracy and Education," MW9.12. *Conatus*, meaning 'a tendency to persist', or 'to struggle: *essendi*, meaning 'to make real' or 'endow with essence'; thus 'the essential struggle' or 'the endeavour to become the essence'.

⁹⁶ Dewey, "Democracy and Education," MW9.4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Ohira Tetsuya et al., "The Relation of Anger Expression with Blood Pressure Levels and Hypertension in Rural and Urban Japanese Communities," *Journal of Hypertension*, no. 20

More esoterically it may be evidenced in those *apparent* attributes of human nature such as greed, acquisitiveness, self-promotion or marketing etc, which are often taken to be the essential attributes to human character per se, as we observed above. We should also be aware of, and seek to theorise how, privation might also damage continued existence. For Dewey the need for continued growth within social exchange is an essential which we might be deprived of.

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey writes that living things will struggle to use surrounding energies, such as wind, food sources, moisture etc., to preserve their own being.⁹⁹ The human animal is a special case amongst the animal kingdom due to its exceptionally long maturation process. We need to be trained into the full compliment of preserving capacities our species has discovered and created for self-renewal and self-sufficient mature adulthood. As well as implying our deeply interwoven inter-dependence as essentially social creatures, this also leads to the importance of culture and of education. The immature members of the species need to be initiated into the mechanisms or instruments of our conatus which has been developed over generations or millennia. The interests, purposes, information, skill, and practices of the mature members of a community or culture must be passed on, otherwise the group will cease its characteristic life.¹⁰⁰ As a human society endures, the gap between new-borns and mature elders increases, thus the need for education grows with the generations. Growth, from dependent new born to 'dependent' adulthood and beyond, is an absolute essential for the individual human being if it is to survive at all, but also if it is to survive healthily in its particular 'found' social environment. We *cannot but grow*, given conatus, and our embeddedness in a growing historically extending society or culture. This embeddedness becomes more and more complex, more and more differentiated from the simpler living forms with their less developed

(2002). Cited in Peter L Heller, "Let's Return to Our Roots: Sociology's Original Pursuit. The Just Society (2001 Presidential Address)," *Sociological Spectrum*, no. 23 (2003).

⁹⁹ Dewey, "Democracy and Education," MW9.4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, MW9.6.

cultural structures, and less developed rational capacities. The complexity of human life is beyond mere physiology, but also encompasses "beliefs, ideals, hopes, happiness, misery, and practices."¹⁰¹ Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, of its cultural capacities and dependencies, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, and communication.¹⁰² For Dewey, these seem to constitute part of a view of human nature, with the transmission of culture through communication, and through education in its broadest sense.

Not only is social life therefore identical with communication, but all genuine social life is educative. In the final account not only does social life demand teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates. Society itself enlarges and enlightens human experience, stimulates and enriches imagination, and creates a responsibility for accuracy and lucidity of statement and thought. Dewey seems to echo Elster's¹⁰³ insistence, however, that the kinds of effect we are concerned with here, the 'goods' which democratic participation produces, are mere by-products of the instrumental process. While the worth of any economic, domestic, political, legal or religious, social institution can be measured by its effect in enlarging and improving experience, its original purpose for being brought into being was, and always will be, overtly practical. These immediately practical motives include securing the favour of overruling powers, the desire to gratify appetites, and secure family perpetuity.¹⁰⁴ It seems immanent in Dewey's account, however, that these very actions contain *themselves* an element of prior, deeper human impulses. In particular, this setting of these statements within a chapter entitled '*Education as a necessity of life*' would seem to indicate that those political institutions serve the purpose of securing human life in some continuity with desired good and productive relationships. In this

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, MW9.5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, MW9.7.

¹⁰³ Elster, "The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory."

¹⁰⁴ Dewey, "Democracy and Education," MW9.9.

context what Dewey and Elster call 'by-products' are, at the very least, co-products of institutional political organisation, if not in reality prior to that institutionalism.

Without a 'full' conception of human nature, growth simply becomes the piling-up of more and more experience until we die of old age under the weight of it all. We can begin to fill-out Dewey's conception of human nature a little by considering the primary condition for growth, which Dewey declares, is immaturity.¹⁰⁵ This consists in two traits or powers, which are 'dependence' and 'plasticity'. All living being has the capacity for growth, not merely a *passive* capacity, as a glass waits to be filled, but the *active power* or potential to come to be more than it currently is. It is a positively present ability to develop. If we view immaturity comparatively against a later state of adulthood we make the mistake of seeing it as a fixed state. Immaturity is an *absolute* condition, not a comparative one. We possess the emergent power to grow. Thus the trait of dependency in immaturity is something positive, and dependence is actually a power, which involves interdependence.

The trait of plasticity is not an ability or a condition of taking an externally imposed form, like imprinting a thumb in plasticine, but rather the ability to learn from experience.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore something like Locke's taking *into* our being a property of the environment. More plainly it is the ability to develop dispositions or habits. Habits are tools which enable us to manipulate or cope with the world. The notion of habit as fixity is explicitly rejected by Dewey as a form of slavery.¹⁰⁷ We become slaves to habits in as much as we do not question, critique, or deconstruct them, for in such conditions our habits may well be 'other serving'. Constant critique

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, MW9.46.

¹⁰⁶ John Dewey, "Freedom of Will," ([1911]), MW6.465. "*Plasticity*, tendency to variation, to growth, to readjustment of habit, are also native to the self. This covers a large part of the practical meaning of "free will," viz. power to reform, to develop, to alter unfavorable tendencies, and to take on new and better habits." [First published in *A Cyclopaedia of Education*, ed. Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911), Vols. 1 and 2.]

¹⁰⁷ Dewey, "Democracy and Education," MW9.54.

or deconstruction of our habits, to prevent them becoming stale unthinking regularities of thought and behaviour, is an end in itself. Our re-invention of ourselves, the deconstruction and re-production of identities, structures, relationships, etc. cannot be guided *towards* anything, and change takes on an ontological aspect. Dewey avoids what Bhaskar calls the 'epistemological fallacy' - the reducing of what there can be to what we can know - by insisting that, "excessive attention to surface phenomena (even in the way of rebuke as well as of encouragement) may lead to their fixation and thus to arrested development."¹⁰⁸

Growth is, however, the characteristic of being, and education is a correlate of growing, having no end beyond itself.¹⁰⁹ The concern of any parent and teacher, or for that matter any citizen of a participatory democracy, the point *towards* which the child's impulses are moving, is more growth, more movement. Thus while Dewey rejects the surface as the sum and total of life - avoiding the epistemological fallacy - he hovers in the area of the 'actualist fallacy' where all that is is all that is possible. He is resolutely opposed to growth being directed towards any goal, or informed by any impulse, but growth in and of itself. As a synonym for self-realisation, growth is somewhat empty; as a metaphor or analogy it is barren. For Dewey, the acorn is only actually a seed, it cannot be talked about as being ontologically or potentially an oak tree.

Dewey argues that the term 'religious' related to any attitude that was intensive, self-unifying, and inclusive. He certainly held a self-unifying, inclusive and intensive attitude to participatory democracy as a social ideal.¹¹⁰ Here faith is a tendency to act towards an unfixed ideal, it is a possibility. The democratic faith is something which does not yet exist, but is a possibility contained in an existing position. Dewey insists that it is not entirely without roots or support in existing conditions and he sought to show that this ideal had its

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., MW9.57.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., MW9.58.

¹¹⁰ John Dewey, "A Common Faith," ([1933]), LW9.16, 19.

roots in natural conditions. The ideal of democratic faith could thus emerge if human imagination could fix or lay hold of the possibilities which exist, through the application of thought and action.¹¹¹ Nonetheless for Dewey an ideal is not a fixed thing, it is a guide to action, and the results of that action reconstruct that ideal in an ongoing process.

Ethics

Moral philosophy divides generally into two approaches to guide discussion of right and wrong: between a Kantian morality of duty, and an Aristotelian ethics of the good. The duty of conformity to abstract principles as a moral framework, found in Kant, tends to leave us with the problem of siting moral ethics within our changing concrete lives.¹¹² Our personal character, which must make ethical decisions is, after all, situated in a world of concrete relationality. As an antidote to this situated problematic we are led to consider an Aristotelian good life as a framework around which to hang our ethical decision making. Relying only on the idea of a good life, however, is less applicable in conditions of value pluralism. It can also miss how moral demands are shared between or amongst agents. It does, however, offer a view of the formation of personality, ends in life, and value orientations, which an ethic of duty fails to account for. Dewey attempts a mediation between these approaches through his all-embracing development of a pragmatic, action-relevant rationality. Dewey's original commitment to an Hegelian concept of self-realisation was replaced over time, although, as I have already observed above, Dewey admitted that he was never able to let go of it entirely, with an idea of an ethical proceduralism as the integrating motif between a Kantian and Aristotelian ethical philosophy.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, LW9.33.

¹¹² Peter Vardy and Paul Grosch, *The Puzzle of Ethics*, Rev. ed. (London: Fount, 1999), 57-59.

As a first principle Dewey makes the distinction between *customary* morality and *reflective* morality, from which he arrives at a self-limitation of moral theory to a simple proceduralism, a proceduralism based on a pragmatic investigation of science as applicable both to physical and moral phenomena.¹¹³ In doing this, Honneth for instance, claims that Dewey slipped into a "naturalist teleology" in constructing his reflective procedure.¹¹⁴ In his towering work of ethical theory, the 1908 *Ethics*, Dewey is often taken to insist on the instrumental role of moral principles, which has been read by many critics as some sort of Hobbesian pursuit by agents for the satisfaction of active dispositions.¹¹⁵ What Dewey was trying to articulate was derived from, and premised on, his conception of scientific judgment, which he first set out in 'Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality', although he failed to recapitulate this in the 1908 *Ethics*.¹¹⁶

In the 'Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality' Dewey reformulated the scientific method so that it could be equally applied to both practical concrete problems and to moral problems. In effect ethics becomes an instrumental tool for moral inquiry or experimentation. To all intents and purposes, Dewey thus does away with the difference between 'fact' and 'value'. For the purposes of rational inquiry they become the same thing.¹¹⁷ 'Scientific' for Dewey came to mean "regular methods of controlling the formation of judgments regarding some subject-matter."¹¹⁸ From being a method of

¹¹³ Axel Honneth, "Between Proceduralism and Teleology: An Unresolved Conflict in Dewey's Moral Theory," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 34, no. 3 Summer (1998). See also Dewey, "Ethics," MW5.41-3, Dewey, "Ethics 2nd Ed.," Pt. 1 Chpts. 4-8.

¹¹⁴ Honneth, "Between Proceduralism and Teleology," 690.

¹¹⁵ This interpretation has been made by both friendly critics such as Lippmann, and Bourne, and by the less than friendly, such as Russell. Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public: A Sequel to "Public Opinion"* (New York: Macmillan, 1927). Randolph Silliman Bourne, "Twilight of Idols," in *War and the Intellectuals: Essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915-1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). Bertrand Russell, "Pragmatism," in *Philosophical Essays* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹⁶ John Dewey, "Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality," ([1903]).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, MW3.3.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

coming to know the *real*, scientific investigation becomes a method for *warranting belief* through an accepted set of descriptions and hypotheses confirmable by empirical test. We can then generate predictions about actual events from our hypotheses which can be tested against future events.¹¹⁹ Science thus becomes a procedure for justifying judgments rather than an endeavour concerned about particular phenomena. To follow scientific procedures, to be a member of a scientific community, is to agree to abide by the judgment of the consensus because the practice of inquiry is guaranteed to proceed in accordance with general rules about *how* to gain and confirm knowledge.

Applied to democracy this produces a pragmatically, rational, *communitarian* society. One's own or others' evaluations of phenomena are judged on the basis of those community rules alone. Pragmatic science, like pragmatic philosophy and democracy, becomes a tool used by human beings to arrive at *meaning* in life. In such a methodological world 'values' are understood to be analogous to 'facts'.¹²⁰ They are both, in pragmatism, constructs, not objects of immediate understanding. This is quite consonant with a critical realist standpoint, *except* in Dewey's dismissal of the real. Again he falls into the fallacy of actualism. Despite the protestations noted earlier about surface phenomena, his knowledge, understanding, and ethics is able only to penetrate a little way below the surface of existing experience, if at all. An observation or perception of warmth, for instance, is merely anecdotal until confirmed by the deeper intellectual process of reading a thermometer. Without such a confirmation process our 'perception' does not become a scientific 'fact'. Although we may have 'felt' warm, we are, after confirmation by observation not 'actually' warm at all. This however still leaves our perception; although we are not in 'reality' actually warm we might really *feel* warm. Other considerations, of perhaps the unseen, 'real' conditions such as embarrassment or anxiety, need to be considered.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, MW3.9.

¹²⁰ John Dewey, "The Logic of Judgments of Practice," ([1915]), MW8.24.

So, as Dewey argues, values such as the goodness, beauty, efficiency or rightness of a given act only come into being as a result of a series of intellectual processes. We cannot necessarily dismiss or transform these values simply by reference to immediate empirical observation and the action of our reason upon them alone. We must also further consider other deeper perhaps unseen, but nevertheless 'real' phenomena, such as custom, the cash nexus or the contradictory dynamic of a 'full' human nature. A deeper basis for enduring ethical decision-making must also establish that which Dewey calls reflective morality. His philosophy is there to teach us to think rationally and critically about conflicting and perhaps incommensurable values, and as such, it operates at the intersection of positive science and human culture. Positive science only *implies* the ends to which a community aims, it pursues them instrumentally and disinterestedly. Philosophy, and its political correlate, democratic faith, is thus implicated in the task of critiquing existing aims in the light of the status of science, in regard to genetic embryology or biogenetic intervention, for instance.¹²¹ On this reading a form of communitarianism begins to emerge from Dewey's two-level ethical programme.

In customary morality the motive is to seek some good which is social, but an individual agent acts for the group mainly because they are of the group, and do not conceive their own good as distinct from that of the group.¹²² Their actions are only in part guided by intelligence, and in part by habit or customary accident. In "full" or reflective morality an act is consciously intended and valued, and is freely, intelligently and wholeheartedly chosen.¹²³ This may be taken to place Dewey close to moral realism as he situates his moral theory, pragmatically, somewhere between Kant and Aristotle.

¹²¹ Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2002), Slavoj Žižek, "Bring Me My Philips Mental Jacket: Slavoj Žižek Welcomes the Prospect of Biogenetic Intervention," *London Review of Books*, 22 May 2003.

¹²² Dewey, "Ethics," MW5.42.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

The unconstrained realisation of capacities and needs of an agent, however, can only occur in communities of recognition and agreement, where a democratic faith holds sway. To account for how agents can even begin to come to realise their selves, Dewey was moved to develop a theory of *articulation*, a form of situated ethical conversation with the self over consequences. Self-realisation is distilled down to rational decision making choice, a limited and contained intellectual process. The upshot is that despite what at first promises to be a form of moral realism, Dewey's pragmatism inevitably reintroduces a relativistic element. Although the product of this underlying pragmatic philosophy, the particular weakness in this scheme finds its deepest expression through Dewey's inability to conceptualise anything other than a 'thin' view of human nature. This is due to the enduring actualism at the heart of pragmatism. Before impulses and felt needs can be effectively articulated, in the process of self-realisation, there is a deal of "decision latitude" in the interpretation of the meaning-content of those impulses. This is resolved through individual, intellectual deliberation on the future possible reactions to each of those interpreted possible future needs. Anticipated consequences are compared to interpretations of needs. Correspondence between these increases or decreases the "morality" of any action. This process has the tangible effect in the agent of a balanced, symmetrical feeling of satisfaction and joy in those actions.¹²⁴ This strategy, however, *increases* Dewey's reliance on self-realisation as the end of this ethical weighing remains the realisation of individual personality.¹²⁵ Although the procedural elements of need interpretation, anticipation of consequences, and examination of one's own emotional reactions begin to take the lead in Dewey's conceptualisation, individuals do remain social beings. Satisfaction and fulfilment are found by agents in cooperative engagement where their actions serve to contribute to community ends. Human beings, claims Dewey, are co-operative beings in the sense that they can find

¹²⁴ Dewey, "Democracy and Education," MW9.351.

¹²⁵ Honneth, "Between Proceduralism and Teleology," 693. [Dewey's *ideal of authenticity* - see Welchman, *Dewey's Ethical Thought*, 96ff.

joy and satisfaction in their own activities only where these activities serve community ends.¹²⁶

Self-realisation is an important aspect of any theory of participatory democracy, and as we have seen Dewey does retain it in his democratic theory in the transformed empirical and non-idealistic guise of 'growth'. It remains, however, undermined through his 'immediate empiricism', as posited in the empirical testing of ethical approaches in his reformulated idea of pragmatic scientific method, and his 'thin' *naturalist* teleology. Dewey's pragmatism, insofar as it is a practical application of his moral theory, serves to map out those landmarks by which a resolution of moral dilemmas may be approached in order to proceed with action. It is designed to help us decide between apparently equal courses of action, and decide what is to be done in *particular* situations which present themselves. The task for Dewey is to show individuals why they should orient themselves to the well-being of a social community when weighing their possible future ends in life. He remains wary of incorporating the moral perspective of Kantian theory into the procedure of ethical decision-making. Consequently Dewey pursues a line where the search for answers is solely determined by the ends of personal self-realisation.¹²⁷ This could be entirely appropriate to participatory democracy, especially if based on a firm conception of human nature which would help us imagine what is required for a self to be realised. As we have seen in relation to Dewey's concept of growth, however, the realisation of individual ends in social, co-operative circumstances is only ever aimed rather generally at further growth.

It is clear from Dewey's instrumental pragmatism that each reflective consideration of moral ends can only be the concern of an *unrepresentable* individual, and in the plurality of ends under consideration each will impact upon each other agent's realisation. Thus reflection must consider which, individual and social, goods, and in what order, are to be realised. This indicates that Dewey is

¹²⁶ Dewey, "Ethics 2nd Ed.," LW7.40, Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.369, John Dewey, "The Social-Economic Situation and Education," ([1933]), LW8.50.

¹²⁷ Honneth, "Between Proceduralism and Teleology," 695.

motivated by ethical conflicts, competing paths to the good life, more than moral conflict or reflection on duty. Dewey's moral theory is about questions of 'what kind of person do I want to be?' when confronted with competing goods.¹²⁸ He avoids providing a blue-print or a set programme of rules or recommendations for solving ethical problems, because a thoughtful or meditative, reflective morality rules out any one version of the good life. Such reflection inevitably suggests to him a reflexive, thus a necessarily individualised choice. To avoid ethics fragmenting entirely into a competing and confused plurality Dewey adopts a Kantian proceduralism. Moral theory is conceived of as a 'generalised extension' or 'reflective form' of the ethical deliberation an individual engages in when attempting to find general principles to direct and justify conduct.¹²⁹

Dewey's moral theory is a process in reflective, reflexive thought, of deliberation to justify or direct action. This makes it always backward looking, a procedure for justifying or rationalising what is already actual. His moral theory becomes a *form*, or procedure to cause personal reflection to be more enlightened and systematic.¹³⁰ This contributes effectively to a case against representative democracy, but the *process* of moral deliberation must be held in common for democracy to hold any legitimacy, especially if it is the power of the procedure which can hold a legitimate democratic plurality together. Thus, despite the presence of deliberation and reflexivity, democratic politics is reduced again to action divorced from thought, as the only criterion upon which Dewey's morality can stand is that of pragmatic, action-relevant rationality.

From his Hegelian beginnings, Dewey aspired to develop a theory of morality which initiated demands or duties from within, from immanent elements of the good life.¹³¹ He endeavoured to prevent a discontinuity developing between personal ends and moral demands,

¹²⁸ Dewey, "Ethics 2nd Ed.," LW7.287.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, LW7.163.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, LW7.166.

¹³¹ see Welchman, *Dewey's Ethical Thought*, chpt 3 & 4.

between private and public, by holding only to those moral demands which can be proven to be associated with a good life. They could, he believed, be proven because moral theory was as much the realm of experiment as physics or biology. In a pluralist, communitarian democracy, experimentation in modes of living, underpinned by a democratic faith, would continually interact with novel ideas and novel environmental conditions to produce reflexive ideas of the good life, in which each citizen would be bound by a scientific duty towards rational inquiry. Dewey, however, continued to hold to a two-dimensional account of science, in which empirical knowledge can be shown to be relative to cultural and community accounts of actuality and moral goods, but in which this actuality is unable to be seen as indicative of deeper, enduring relations, either concrete or moral.

Concluding comments

Dewey believed that the well-being of each person and of our common life could be enhanced through a democracy of participation. This would be a democracy which goes beyond mere electoral provision, of suffrage, majority rule and umbrella parties.¹³² He was deeply troubled that our understanding of democracy had been reduced to this partial, political form. He maintained that such representative forms were necessary in large complex societies but that they were incomplete, even problematic, without both active democratic communities of association and a deeply embedded democratic faith. This faith for Dewey is a revisable impulse towards action which can be "tried and tested only in action".¹³³ It is a tool, a method for both improving social conditions in a world of flux and change, and for realising the self, for individual growth. This instrumental tool was to be a pragmatic experimental method, the forming and testing of hypotheses in a free collaborative community of inquirers, exchanging diverse points of view and results. Built upon

¹³² Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," LW2.325ff.

¹³³ John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," ([1929]), LW5.278.

a conception of science as a procedure, a method for justifying belief empirically, it could be applied equally to chemical formulations, geological strata, economics, democratic institutions or morality.

Underpinning this are two premises: firstly, that all individuals are essentially social beings, therefore democracy is also necessarily a social process; and secondly, that only the evidence of immediate experience, 'radical empiricism', is valid. No recourse to a priori constructions or broad causal explanations was either satisfactory or helpful. These tenets are articulated throughout Dewey's diverse work. In the words of a contemporary realist critic, radical empiricism was a doctrine about knowledge which ignored temporal distinctions.¹³⁴ The motivating dialectic of this philosophy is that knowledge is immediate. A thing can only be known at a given moment of cognition, only if it is both existing and immediately experienced within the time limits of that moment. As a partial justification for direct and participatory democracy on scientific bases this is compelling. Those knowledges which inform political interaction, and direct political action, are increasingly denuded of their worth the further they are removed from their source. As a base for progressive human emancipation, or self-realisation, however, it remains problematic.

In insisting that philosophy can only consider that which is directly experienced, some of those elements which impinge on social and political situations most pervasively are excluded. In democratically practical deliberations, varieties of experience which are crucial to a particular social problem will often be those external to direct, immediate experience. Real, efficient phenomena, which are 'present-as-absence'; such as possible future conditions, representations of a past, and the effects of the not-directly-experienced, will never be verified in any radical-empiricist sense.

¹³⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Pragmatism Versus the Pragmatist," in *Essays in Critical Realism: A Co-Operative Study in the Problem of Knowledge*, ed. Durant Drake, et al. (New York: Gordian Press, 1968[1920]), 79.

Dewey is thus unable to break out of present, actually existing circumstances.

His ethic of growth, for instance, can no more lead to human emancipation than it can grasp the effects of non-empirical, but nonetheless real, phenomena like the preventing of the realisation of our personal and social powers of plasticity and the potential for growth, by other-serving powers. Despite his empiricist commitment, however, Dewey's tireless intellectual curiosity pulls him very close to something like an essentialist position. His concept of growth, for instance, could be interpreted as a theological principle.¹³⁵ His pragmatism, and the widespread reluctance to engage with metaphysics, prevents him from engaging adequately with the concepts he is drawn so close to. What remains is a rather flat ethics, which cannot offer a deeply critical perspective on existing arrangements. An application of critical realist categories, however, could provide a way of preserving the concept of growth and provide a critical, radical edge to the theory of participatory democracy. Collier, for instance, uses just these categories in distinguishing between transitive and intransitive morality, where "historical moralities are the transitive dimension of morality; its intransitive dimension is the intrinsic worth of being".¹³⁶ Such a manoeuvre enables the critical comparison of existing "intra-subjective, inter-subjective, social and cultural-natural relations" against the intransitive morality of the worth of being, in a necessarily moralised world.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ See Festenstein, *Pragmatism and Political Theory*.

¹³⁶ Andrew Collier, *Being and Worth* (London: Routledge, 1999), 62.

¹³⁷ Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Verso, 1993), 259. See also Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Chapter 3 - G.D.H. Cole

The work of G.D.H. Cole begins our outline and assessment of the *essentialist affirmative* tradition of thought in justifying participatory democracy. Through Guild Socialism, Cole presents us with a link to the distant past. In the medieval age political arrangements were very different; both more democratic, through the direct control craftsmen and merchants had of their working practices, and very much less democratic. Cole was himself deeply influenced by that arch medievalist, William Morris. Why, however, should we be concerned with a vision of democracy inspired by the example of the distant past which lost favour so very quickly and apparently so completely? As I shall show there are a number of partial appropriations of Cole's work which indicate his enduring relevance, and an underlying impulse in participatory democracy itself. Guild Socialism faded from the political scene after 1920 and Cole's wider legacy appears to have faded from the realm of political and social theory since his death in 1959. There have only been two substantial studies of Cole, as well as Margaret Cole's biography of her husband.¹ Some interest in the theory of Guild Socialism has arisen, with Paul Hirst's attempt to revive the concept of associative democracy.² Before this, Pateman drew upon Cole, in *Participation and Democratic Theory*, although in a rather instrumental way which settled on Cole's emphasis on the educative function of participatory

¹ Luther P Carpenter, *G.D.H. Cole: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), Margaret Isabel Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971), Anthony W. Wright, *G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Also Houseman's rather slight review of selected works of Cole and his historical environment. Gerald L. Houseman, *G.D.H. Cole*, vol. 255 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979).

² Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), Paul Hirst, *From Statism to Pluralism: Democracy, Civil Society and Global Politics* (London: UCL Press, 1997).

democracy.³ These partial appropriations do, however, offer indications of enduring themes, both in participatory democracy generally, and in Cole's work particularly.

Participatory democracy continues to draw attention for its promise to address the problems of legitimacy of representative democracy, and the divorce that many feel from the political process. Although Hirst does not sidestep the issue of human nature in Guild Socialism, he confronts the issue only to dismiss it out of hand. Hirst is a rationalist seeking an alternative democratic arrangement to provide an effective democracy in which accurate information, objectivity, and rationality in policy making are the crucial characteristics. In his attempts to revive associationalism as a remedy for the ills of contemporary political life, Hirst tends to emphasise merely "the quality of decision making that results from the interaction between the governing agency and the agencies organising the activity being governed."⁴ For his part, Cole hoped to increase the effectiveness of association that already occurred, both in policy and efficiency terms, but, more importantly in human and ethical terms. It is in this context that Hirst objects that guild socialists make a number of "unwarranted", "unjustified" and "fundamentally defective propositions" about human nature.⁵ Hirst makes the archetypical pragmatic sceptical assumption that the human capacity to cooperate in association is 'largely' constructed under definite historical conditions by social processes and training.⁶ Thus the way human beings are motivated to associate is anything but natural and spontaneous. Hirst mistakes these surface phenomena for the whole of the story. Of course we are trained for association, but it is training for the demands of particular formations, the cultural specificities of contemporary association. It remains that association is always sought, whatever the peculiar historical conditions. All Hirst has done is move the discussion onto the surface of social and

³ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

⁴ Hirst, *Associative Democracy*, 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

political phenomena, leaving the deeper significance of association itself unexamined.

The enduring relevance of Cole is due to a feature which all previous readings and commentaries on his work have failed to identify. This chapter will show that all of Cole's work was driven by an underlying commitment to human essence, and enabling the social, economic, and political environment for its fullest realisation. This commitment finds its fullest expression in Guild Socialism, Cole's vision of a participatory democracy. As Margaret Cole observes in her biography of her husband, Guild Socialism only *seemed* to die out completely, and events "show quite clearly that the ideas and impulses which underlay it were not dead but persist, unsatisfied, in modern society."⁷ As this was written in 1971 it was probably referring to the Paris événements, or perhaps the burgeoning shop steward movement in Britain. It might just as well be referring to more recent events in Seattle, Genoa or Porto Alegre, or Manchester, Luton, and Newcastle for that matter.⁸

In what follows, I will begin by linking Cole's commitment to creative intervention to the medievalist tradition, transmitted to him first through the work of William Morris, then by Arthur J Penty. I then investigate Cole's concept of human nature, which involves the needs and desires of the human subject. These needs and desires find expression in Cole's analytical concept of function. Next I consider the role of fellowship in his theory, before examining the capabilities and capacities for self-rule which human beings display. I conclude with a brief account of one of Cole's concrete participatory democratic instruments, the social dividend, known today as basic universal income.

⁷ Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, 50.

⁸ See Hilary Wainwright, *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy* (London: Verso, 2003).

Situating Cole

The tireless activism of Cole, his enduring wish to be useful to the labour movement and to the Labour party, and his unrivalled knowledge of socialist history alone (spanning 7 volumes) secure him a place in British social thought. His crucial involvement in the Guild Socialist movement, and his continual pursuit of its underlying values throughout his life ensure his importance to the study of participatory democracy. In *Guild Socialism Re-stated* Cole made perhaps his most important contribution to social and political theory.⁹ The term Guild Socialism originated with Arthur J. Penty, who was profoundly influenced by Morris.¹⁰ He was an architect who desired a return to medieval standards of craftsmanship in production, and the medieval tradition of self-regulation and self-government in different occupations.¹¹ Through these institutions Penty developed a vision of self-government along the lines of the medieval cities. The Guild Socialists assumed a "gospel of freedom and pride in work, with its concomitants of the Just Price, the 'masterpiece', and limited and controlled entry to the trade."¹² Cole was the most advanced and complete theorist of the Guild Socialist movement, which arose in the years just before the outbreak of the First World War. The movement developed as part of a growing dissatisfaction at that time with the bourgeois state.¹³ Although Cole was influenced by the French, and burgeoning English Syndicalism, this was no mere anarchist reaction against the very idea of the state. Guild Socialism took practical political form in industrial

⁹ G.D.H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-States* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920).

¹⁰ Arthur J. Penty, *The Restoration of the Gild System* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1906). The 'u' was added by Cole, Orage, and Holbrook Jackson, at the *New Age*, to show how modern they were.

¹¹ Just as postmodernism developed out of theories of architecture, so too did Guild Socialism. See David Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 2nd ed., *Concepts in the Social Sciences* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

¹² Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, 51.

¹³ Anthony W. Wright, "Guild Socialism Revisited," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 3 (1979): 167.

militancy, of the syndicalists and the labour movement generally, and in a theoretical challenge to the 'Collectivised State' of the Webbs.

Syndicalism is French for trade unionism, but it also stands as a representation of the particular form of trade union organisation which existed in France due to prevailing cultural, social, industrial, and political conditions.¹⁴ It is this particular form of organisation which Cole found inspirational, and to have distinct parallels to his own, lifelong, preferred form of political, democratic organisation - Guild Socialism - which was also a form of words, in part, representing trade unionism.¹⁵ In Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism, the core motivating force was the "transformation of society through the direct action of the institutions of the industrial workers' own creation - the trade unions."¹⁶ The philosophy of Guild Socialism remained the core philosophy of Cole throughout his life. As Margaret Cole observes, these "deep convictions remained and profoundly influenced everything he said, wrote or did up to the day of his death."¹⁷ Syndicalism, however was a working-class *activity*, not a philosophical movement, as the workers had no fondness, and certainly precious little opportunity, for philosophical study.¹⁸

Cole shared the syndicalists' doubts about the existing order, and particularly the proposed Fabian solution of the collective state. He

¹⁴ F.F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France, the Direct Action of Its Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

¹⁵ see Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole.*, and Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 72-76, 83-87. on CGT organisation: Cole, *World of Labour*, 70-83. on dual local and national affiliation.

¹⁶ Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, 52. Industrial Unionism was the Australian and American version of syndicalism, of the Industrial Workers of the World. See Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Roger Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight!: A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90, Working Class in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, 50.

¹⁸ Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 191-92.

believed they both shared a similar dead calculating philosophy.¹⁹ Cole was, however, impatient with both reformers and the romantic, irrationalist elements of syndicalism. He saw very well the problems of a descent into instinct, and argued that "what is wanted is not annihilation [of the whole collectivist model] and a new start, but revaluation and a new synthesis."²⁰ He deplored the lack of a combination of practical action with a forward looking idealism, and was deeply unhappy with the collectivist perspective which dominated the British labour movement to such an extent that "it seemed unnecessary for anyone to do any further thinking."²¹ The vague uprising that was Syndicalism was seen by Cole as an instinctive protest rather than a new philosophy, much less an enduring solution. Philosophy has a part to play, coming to the aid of the instinctively protesting wage-earner in the new revaluation of political and economic affairs. Nietzsche's 'revaluation of all values' observes Cole "gives place to the *élan vital* of the Bergsonians, and M. Bergson's assertion of instinct as the equal of reason takes on a political aspect which he certainly did not foresee."²² All the protests of the syndicalists were negative. They pointed to something wrong without directly indicating a remedy:

The worship of instinct is in form a worship of the indeterminate, when what is wanted is a new determination. Unrest requires direction, but at present there is no clear lead given save that of the old Collectivism itself. An advance to a new positive theory can only be hoped for when Collectivism is put in its place, when the gaps in its theory are more adequately

¹⁹ Margaret Cole tells of Penty's disgusted resignation from the Fabians over the way they chose the architect for the LSE, "by the simple process of calculating the floor space provided by the ... competing designs and choosing the one which gave the most for the money." Cole, *The Life of G.D.H. Cole*, 51.

²⁰ Cole, *World of Labour*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

understood, and when the materials at hand for reconstruction have been more fully examined.²³

Cole retained a faith in the reasoning capacity of the working-class and the human species as a whole, freed from the travesty of wavery and the abstract reifications of the money economy, of the high-priests "on their secret dark thrones" who manage money "in order to make the world safe for money" and to whom scarcity and plenty are equally profitable, and their effects on human beings equally irrelevant.²⁴

The 'materials at hand' that needed to be more fully examined, were the capacities and capabilities of the people instinctively protesting. Syndicalism was demanding that work be accepted as the central fact of people's lives, and that those people should be identified primarily not as 'citizens' or 'consumers', but as 'producers'. This amounts to a critique both of the bourgeois liberal order and of much of the collectivist/Fabian programme. The Fabians were particularly disappointing to the syndicalists, and to Cole, because they had forgotten their earlier insistence on the importance of trade union action. They came to regard the trade unions, Cole felt, as merely an electioneering spin device to paint the working class in their own collectivist colours.²⁵ They had forgotten the humanity, the people, whose dire and unjust circumstances they were initially offended into working to relieve. Method had taken over and smothered the purpose.

Creative intervention

The theme of creative activity forms a core of Cole's conception of human nature. In the 1913 book, *The World of Labour*, Cole

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ G.D.H. Cole, *Principles of Economic Planning*, ed. David Reisman, 10 vols., vol. 7, *Democratic Socialism in Britain: Classic Texts in Economic and Political Thought, 1825-1952* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996[1935]), 5, 8. See chapter one, *Why do we need a plan?*, for his faith in reason.

²⁵ Cole, *World of Labour*, 7.

significantly draws upon Morris's version of work as a creative activity, the ideal "of enabling men somehow to express, in the daily work of their hands, some part of that infinitely subtle and various personality which lives in each one of them, if we can but call it out."²⁶ Later in life Cole edited a volume of Morris's work and in the introduction wrote an essay which showed that he still held those ideals, even after the failure of Guild Socialism.²⁷ The ideals that propelled him, from his early romantic youth, and which underpinned his Guild Socialist years, were still present in his mind in 1935. Given his continual foundational use of such themes it seems appropriate to examine what Cole drew from Morris. After surveying how he describes the life, work, and motivations of Morris we can draw out those elements which Cole brought to his own intellectual development.

Cole lived in an age of "critical and highly intellectualised appreciations", one that demanded significance over aesthetic imagery for its own sake.²⁸ It was an age which worshipped instrumental reason, an age suspicious of free creativity, suspicious of un-regulated activity. The Victorian world in which Morris lived, by contrast, had a great deal of time for beautiful imagery. In this world Morris was able to create many such attractive things, to fill Kelmscott and the world with things of beauty. Morris's personal disposition was one of gentle appreciation, and he was particularly drawn to the magnificence of the middle ages, ancient French poetry, and of Chaucer. The influence of all these can be found throughout his work. He also appreciated the many evils of his day and denounced them enthusiastically. He always preserved, however, a desire to understand where things had gone wrong. It appears that Cole felt much of Morris's work to be far too concerned with prettiness, although he also found much to admire, most especially in his later more overtly socialist work. There is a significant difference

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷ G.D.H. Cole, "Introduction," in *William Morris. Stories in Prose, Stories in Verse, Shorter Poems and Essays*, ed. G.D.H. Cole (London: Nonesuch Press, 1948 [1953]).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xii.

between Morris's arts and crafts prettiness and his less finished, but more passionate, socialist writings.

There may be less craft in his work for *The Commonwealth* but Cole finds much more of the man in this body of work.²⁹ Indeed it is in his socialist writings, in *News From Nowhere* and *The Pilgrims of Hope* for instance, that his creativity produces its most original results. In these works the creative activity of art is combined with a conception of politics as also a creative activity. Both art and politics can be seen as reflecting, and at the same time creating, the world and human life. In Morris's Icelandic saga, *Sigurd*, Cole finds a "vision of another part of life [Morris] was conscious of leaving out in his earlier tales and romances."³⁰ In a bleak and unyielding environment, struggle and heroism carved out lives of greatness in, "a reality of high living under hard conditions".³¹ Cole believes that Morris was, in these hard-bitten Icelandic Sagas, redressing the balance of his artistic life. He was creating a vision of a whole life, of creative struggle and sustaining work against the self-conscious beauty of his arts and crafts work. It is a more profound development, however, than a filling-out of the vision of an artist. Clearly Morris's personal human flourishing was given heart by his political activity, and his work benefited from the discovery, and utilisation of, the example of hard struggle into his art. Morris had found the deepest and most satisfying function of his will in a shared struggle to create a better life for all.

Cole here is latching onto themes of work and creative struggle where Morris's work finds a concrete lived and social purpose. It is a connection with the world, and with the deep motivating purpose of human being, rather than an endeavour to decorate the surface of it. Just as Cole never discarded his ideal, so Morris before him remained faithful to his. What changed in Morris was his view of how it was to

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii-iv. "Scribbling hard for *The Commonwealth*, in a cause that had hold of him in his deepest and most intimate faith, he put more stuff, though less finish, into his writing than when simply making pictures."

³⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

³¹ *Ibid.*

be achieved, his method and arena. In his socialist activity Morris tasted a little of that heroic Icelandic saga for himself. Morris realised that the regeneration of the artistic life of society could not bring about the changes he wished for. A life of beauty and creative endeavour would not arise from the squalor and ugliness that so many lived in through private acts of charity, personal example, or the creation of isolated objects of beauty. All these elements, important as they were, were inseparable from the wider social and economic structures in which they were set. The art of beautiful living was fundamentally a political, not merely an aesthetic or artistic concern. Consequently it was to political activity that Morris turned, to enable all to realise their creative impulses in their daily lives and work. Without changing his aim, Morris drew strength from his immersion in this very different way of life.

The work with machines which he thus encountered was, for Morris, an aberration, not entirely for romantic, nostalgic reasons. They enforced a deadening toil, which is all but useless for the worker, especially as the useless toil was usually poorly paid for.³² Work ought to contribute to the development of human potentiality, not stunt it. To suggest that work is merely a means to fund leisure time, where such romantic notions as creative realisation can then be freely chosen, is to Morris, and no less to Cole, a nonsense. The deadening influence of wage slavery cannot but carry over to the rest of life. Cole calls Morris's recognition of the capitalist version of work, as an irksome toil, not the pitiable romantic myth of the artist, but as a "clear vision of the truth."³³ Morris particularly resented the division of labour of capitalist industrial production. The artificial separation of craftsman from designer was not only a mechanism for creating and 'naturalising' inequality, it also degraded the concept of labour. It separated the whole person into competing parts, where there had been a creative, dynamic whole. He believed the creative impulse to be profoundly natural, and argued that it may be

³² Cole, *World of Labour*, 420.

³³ Cole, "William Morris: Introduction," xxi.

suppressed, perverted, or degraded, but it could never be torn entirely from people.

Although many of Morris's individual works fall short of greatness, Cole saw more than a little greatness in his life as a whole. In Cole's estimation it is the sum of a life, not its isolated moments, or products, that give the true tenor of that life.³⁴ Of Morris, he declared:

I like best to think of him as the man who, loving beauty, wanted to make beauty a common possession of all mankind, and, realising how much stood in the way, did not shrink from giving battle to giants. In short, I like to think of him as the creative artist who was also a Socialist, and was artist and Socialist, *not as two separate things*, but as aspects of one and the same faith in human fellowship.³⁵

While the medievalists were infused with medieval virtue ethics, a commitment to human good and human flourishing, Cole too drew upon these metaphysical influences. Previous commentators on Cole have failed to adequately recognise this influence, perhaps because Cole himself, in an instrumental age suspicious of metaphysics, and driven by a need to be useful to the labour movement, never directly theorised this aspect. I will now explore the extent of this absence in the appreciation of Cole's work, because of the underlying importance of these themes, will be demonstrated through an analysis of the key elements of his participatory democracy theory, beginning with human nature. The example of Morris' commitment to deepening the lives of all in his socialist activity, and the amalgam of all these in the life of Morris himself, were constant and deeply felt inspirations to Cole. Of particular significance was his commitment to work as a synthesis of human creativity and productivity, which indicate essential impulses to human being, and which Cole sought to give expression in democratic arrangements.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xxiii-xxiv. Emphasis added.

Human nature

Any account of appropriate or possible democracy must rest upon judgments about human needs, desires and, capacities. All theories of the arrangement of political conditions, of democracy, contain assumptions about what people can and cannot achieve. The possibility of satisfying or fulfilling those capacities rests upon, not only currently present conditions, but also upon possible but absent conditions.³⁶ Human beings may be possessed of certain powers, as individuals, as a community, and as a species, which existing social arrangements preclude or disfigure. To speak of the potentialities or capacities which particular theories of democracy may foster or discount allows us to consider political conditions which, "control, limit, structure or frustrate potentialities."³⁷ The failure of such potentialities to emerge can then be traced to the absence of necessary supporting conditions and institutions. Cole's account of individuals and their relationship to their social environment is grounded in just such a synergy between individual potential and its conditioning environment.

He makes many comments or allusions to individual potential and to the human capacity for self-rule, the ability to manage affairs, to rationally debate, to make just judgement. They are capacities which are indwelling and which he regards as finding, pursuing even, expression in free and diverse associations of function and in engagement in free labour. Cole does actually abandon the characteristic reserve of the English, empiricist tradition and declare that democracy rests essentially in a trust in human nature.³⁸ If democracy declares anything, he insists, it asserts "that man is

³⁶ Graeme Duncan, "Human Nature and Radical Democratic Theory," in *Democratic Theory and Practice*, ed. Graeme Duncan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 187. see also Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 124.

³⁷ Duncan, "Human Nature and Radical Democratic Theory," 188.

³⁸ G.D.H. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 5th ed. (London: G. Bell, 1920), 230.

capable to govern himself.”³⁹ Cole’s Guild Socialism is in effect, and arguably primarily, a means by which the fullest expression of a wider and deeper self-rule of creative interveners, in and on their individual and shared world, can be enjoyed. This is a dynamic model of humanity, in which individuals grow and change through their own choices, instead of being stale or being passive towards choices made for them.⁴⁰

Cole’s commitment to human flourishing pervades all his work, from his Guild socialist days, through his work in the Labour Research Department, and the Nuffield Social Reconstruction Survey, to his final days. Amongst his vast written output, however, two of Cole’s books will be particularly closely examined here to provide evidence for his views on human nature. *The World of Labour* was Cole’s first book, originally published in 1913, at a time when trade union activity was confident, vigorous, and militant.⁴¹ It is both an investigation of, and a manifesto for, the labour movement, and of what it was capable of making of itself. The second fruitful source for our purposes, *Social Theory*, appeared in the same year as Cole’s final and most extensive blue-print of a Guild Socialist society, *Guild Socialism Restated*.⁴² In *Social Theory* he sets out an explicitly normative account of society, and the appropriate method of analysis of social and political formations. In doing so, Cole opposes a way of doing social and political investigations which sees human society only in the positivist and one-dimensional terms of force and the rule of law, of the power and coercion held by the state. For Cole, such a conception begins at the wrong end of the production of power, with the coercion which is applied to people in society, and not with the motives which hold them together in association. Cole is concerned with the origins of coercion, which he sees as a maladaptive reaction to the ever-present creation and re-creation of social power.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Carpenter, G.D.H. *Cole: An Intellectual Biography*, 235.

⁴¹ Cole, *World of Labour*.

⁴² Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, Cole, *Social Theory*.

Society is a necessary human creation, which is also the conscious, combined result of individuals exercising their power of creative activity. To attempt to study society and politics through examination of the coercive powers subsequently applied to people is misleading. Cole believed that to use metaphors from the natural, first and second order natural science - physics, chemistry, biology or even psychology - was inappropriate. He is uncomfortable with any attempt to simply transpose the methods and criteria of the natural sciences to the study of human society. Society is no more a mindless mechanism than it is an organism or a single entity. In Cole's view the use of terminologies imported into a study for which they are unsuited will result in confusion, and only produce conclusions which are unusable. Cole is predominantly concerned, however, with social theory as the social counterpart to ethics, with 'ought' rather than 'is'.⁴³ An essential consequence of this is to re-emphasise a conception of social power as *power-to* in preference to *power-over*, as this identifies that which is possible, rather than merely describing what is.

In the 1917 preface to *The World of Labour* Cole lamented the consequences of trade union pragmatism during the first world war, for accepting joint control of industry in the hope of further control later. Trade unionism needed to find an ideal, or otherwise "all our industries will be 'munitionised', and all our workers will be enslaved."⁴⁴ Effectively the trade unions were taking what employers were happy to concede so as to preserve their existing conditions. Cole's warning highlights what was for him a constant element of his analysis. The main problem facing society, the 'fundamental evil', is slavery not poverty.⁴⁵ In a workplace where they are only expected to do as they are told by their masters, workers can only be considered free from a most cynical perspective. When this work is further unavoidable because of the basic human needs which must be paid for, from an income earned at whatever rate is profitable to a narrow

⁴³ Cole, *Social Theory*, 21.

⁴⁴ Cole, *World of Labour*, xxxiv.

⁴⁵ Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 34.

interest in society, 'wagery' is added to unfreedom. As shall be seen below, this concern for the virtual imposed slavery of the necessity of paid employment at whatever rate, stimulated one of the earliest and most coherent formulations of a Basic Income policy yet advanced.

Although there is a deal of pragmatism in Cole's pluralism, he was practically aware of the finer consequences of means-action pragmatism when it was not allied with a consciousness of an end-view idealism. Cole here represents a clear link with older forms of socialism, of people like Owen, and the Christian Socialists, and with the idealism of Ruskin and Morris. The end-view idealism Cole has in mind is the full satisfaction sought in work over the mere drudgery of wagery. Morris's wish that everything made should be a 'joy to the maker and the user' has parallels with the demands then being made by labour. Apart from the common-sense ideal of better wages, there was another, deeper ideal that the trade unions were beginning to articulate. This was to enable people to express, in their daily, necessary work, some part of "that infinitely subtle and various personality which lives in each one of them".⁴⁶ Industrial capitalism has not done away with this element of people's spirit, though it has often maimed and perverted their whole lives and works.

Capitalist exploitation of labour continues only through the exercise of will, or more precisely its absence. If labour could shake off its exhaustion and engage its masters with a clear goal and methods, it could will the transformation of these 'eternal verities' and replace them with something better.⁴⁷ This will, while residing, in the final analysis in individuals, requires social form for it to be effectively realised. We are reliant on others for much of our activity, for our sense of identity, for the means of getting things done, and for turning our will into material reality. However much society becomes fragmented and individualised people continue to form themselves into associations. Indeed, even though they do not

⁴⁶ Cole, *World of Labour*, 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 414.

have the benefit of the legal sanction of the state, people do pursue their several ends together. These associations, however, will exercise power within their own sphere of operation, as in the case of Churches or trade unions.⁴⁸ To these could now be added corporations, commercial interests, political parties, and any number of NGOs and pressure groups. These varied human associations frame codes of behaviour by and for their members, who are gathered together for common purpose. This commitment to common purpose in associations of will, Cole holds, secure voluntary observation of these codes by individual members without the need for external coercion.⁴⁹ The General Will will be found and recognised in democratic association.

Representative democracy is not excluded or totally replaced in Cole's democracy. Although his preference was for small-scale, face-to-face democratic relations, this did not amount to a Rousseauian city-state, or to hermetically sealed communitarianism. Large-scale, cross-community affairs could be managed through activity in smaller local direct affairs, as we encounter and become familiar with fellow citizens we can trust with these larger decisions.⁵⁰ The confusion of larger level democracy, where complex issues pile up and cross over each other, where hubris can exert its influence, was to be avoided through function. The separating-out of problems along the lines of functional considerations was essential so as to encourage direct representation of each person's plurality of relevant interests.⁵¹ In these limited spheres of functional plurality the general will could thus effectively operate. Despite this, Cole remained distrustful of, as well as deeply influenced by, Rousseau. He could not see the

⁴⁸ Cole, *Social Theory*, 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁰ G.D.H. Cole, *Essays in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 94.

⁵¹ Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, G.D.H. Cole, *Labour in the Commonwealth: A Book for the Younger Generation*, *New Commonwealth Books* (London: Pelican Press, 1919), 188.

general will as realistically and democratically operating at the higher levels of society.⁵²

Function

Cole describes the underlying principle of all these social organisations, *function*. An individual's pursuit of function is distinct from community, although it remains dependent on a sense of unity and social fellowship for its manifestation. This is not a mechanistic ethic of function, as a supreme governing principle where each individual, rather than seeking their own self-interest, their self-development or self-expression, will be expected to fulfil their function within the social whole of which they merely form a part. Such a theory could easily result, not merely in a denial of all democracy, but also in a denial of humanity itself. In turn, this could lead to a glorification or personification of society, in which respect for the individual is largely lost. Viewed as a causal mechanism, function will destroy free will, in the master-slave type relations of a class society. Cole is explicit, however, in pursuing equality to rid society of the 'monstrous and irrefutable fact' of class.⁵³ Function is a way of describing the plural, diverse, and overlapping sites in which each social agent employs their ability, individually and severally, to intervene and create their present and future environment. In effect, the principle of function refers to the employment of individual and social causal powers in the realisation of human potential.

For Cole the formulation of *function* as a social duty is obviously not satisfactory as an ethical principle.⁵⁴ Or rather, unsatisfactory as *the* principle which should determine individual conduct. This is not

⁵² Cole, *Social Theory*, 51, 105, Jean-Jacques Rousseau et al., *The Social Contract; and, Discourses*, 3rd ed., *Everyman's Library* (London: Dent, 1993), xxxvi.

⁵³ Cole, *World of Labour*, 25.

⁵⁴ Cole is insistent on a number of occasions that associations are not persons; an insistence which seems lost on Nicholls. David Nicholls, *Three Varieties of Pluralism* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

because each individual has not, in a very real sense, a function to fulfil, but because she has so many *various* functions. It is in the choice of and between functions and "in assigning their relative places to the many functions, social and personal, of which we are conscious, that our *selfhood appears as a co-ordinating principle beyond any of them.*"⁵⁵ Thus for Cole *self-hood* is an essential ground to his theory of function, which is of course also a *social* principle. This is not a scheme based on the liberal cult of individualism, but of a liberated individuality within society. In conceptualising freedom negatively, as the absence of restraint, liberals are led to the positive conception of freedom as the presence of law.⁵⁶ For Cole, however, self-government is the guarantee of freedom, not law as such.⁵⁷ Democracy for Cole was much more a state of mind and a moral relationship than a function of voting. He insisted that the democracy he stood for, meant "making people really free and self-governing, not the votes they record when they are neither."⁵⁸ Cole was wholeheartedly a participatory democrat, defining democracy in terms of equality, fellowship and self-government, rather than majority rule, electoral procedures, and constitutions. These latter three were the concerns of liberals who retained a fine but effective element of authoritarianism in their rather tentative embrace of democracy. This is particularly evident in their reliance on a state to police laws, rights, and obligations.⁵⁹ Freedom in democracy was not a matter of striking a balance between personal and social liberty as they were already necessarily in a complimentary relationship.⁶⁰ The qualities of an active democracy only flourish in a people that are free. The willingness to experiment, to take risks, and the desire to do things well for the sake of doing them well; these are the hallmarks of a free people for Cole. This desire to cooperate with

⁵⁵ Cole, *Social Theory*, 48-49. emphasis added

⁵⁶ Cole, *Labour in the Commonwealth*, 194-95.

⁵⁷ Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 227.

⁵⁸ Cole, *Essays in Social Theory*, 247.

⁵⁹ Cole, *Social Theory*, 184.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 184-85.

one's fellows, in adventurous, adaptable and progressive activity are the qualities "implanted in every political animal ... free man is man whole; it is the man in chains who is conservative, timid and stationary."⁶¹ Self-hood is formed, constructed, and realised within functional associations, but it is the freely chosen ranking and selection of our diverse functions, in social and political engagement, which define that self-hood. Self-hood *is* activity, and one pivotal aspect of this activity is self-government.

Just as the purpose or object, for which people call associations into being, will be specific, so must the activity of them be specific. Cole insists, however, that the human beings which form those associations are in their nature universal.⁶² Their actions, purposes, and desires may be specific, but this is the case only in so much as they are made so by persons as acting agents. The acting agents themselves are not and cannot be 'specific', and cannot properly be described in terms of individual functions. An individual can only become functional, or even multi-functional, by being limited or constrained.⁶³ Each individual is universal, and each human being contains vast potential, which will be partially realised piecemeal in the articulation of many functions expressed in a plurality of specific social forms. Democracy properly understood does not count heads, "or if it does, it counts everyone as more than one - in fact, as infinite."⁶⁴

Cole classifies these social forms, or associations of functional will, into those which are socially essential, and those which are not. The essential associations are those that perform functions central to a working and coherent society, such as political, vocational, and appetitive associations. Cole also points out that some 'non-essential' associations will have transcendent value to the

⁶¹ Cole, *Labour in the Commonwealth*, 125, Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 297.

⁶² Cole, *Social Theory*, 50.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁶⁴ Cole, *Essays in Social Theory*, 323.

individual.⁶⁵ What he calls 'sociable' and 'philanthropic' associations could be included here. Within the vast range of sociable associations; for instance, reading groups, dancing clubs, rambles, and many, many more, people gather together to share experiences, ideas, emotions, and an equally vast range of interpersonal creativity. All these combine to produce the kind of people we are and strive to become. If we can see Cole's functions as expressions of diverse inherent causal powers, and the associations in which we seek to give them realisation as being essential to *social coherence*, we have a conception of a self-sustaining social structure reproducing itself through its own essential mechanism.

These considerations form part of Cole's extended objection to representative democracy as the whole of democracy. They also put forward the parts of an argument for the basic foundations of the human subject. It is productive, creative activity which draws all the diversities of a life together which constitute the concrete individual. In a similar fashion society itself becomes an interconnected, mutually interdependent concrete whole. Given this, it would be impossible to politically represent a human being as a single self or a centre of consciousness. It is possible, however, to represent those particular elements of consciousness which people express in associated effort.⁶⁶ Here, together in associated effort, they will then be representing themselves, or at least that specific function which they are at that moment pursuing and constructing in that association.⁶⁷ For Cole, the limited usefulness of representation is because "what is represented is never man [sic], the individual, but always certain purposes common to groups of individuals."⁶⁸ He asserts that each person is a centre of reason and consciousness, "a will possessed of the power of self-determination, an ultimate reality."⁶⁹ How could one such will stand in for many? How could one

⁶⁵ Cole, *Social Theory*, 65.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

⁶⁷ Cole, *Essays in Social Theory*, 94.

⁶⁸ Cole, *Social Theory*, 106.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

person, being herself, at the same time be a number of other people? People perform many functions, and are active in many ways and arenas. Thus on one level one person can have many other personalities or identities, but these are roles that a real person adopts or performs. This diversity re-confirms the validity of Cole's opposition to representation as the whole of democracy. One representative will represent herself, in her many different roles. Anyone else she is purported to represent will also be equally diverse, in functions and will. Such an individual could only be true to themselves whilst in activity. Their consciousness and will, evident only in their activity, cannot be represented, it can only be itself.

Whilst pursuing his criticism of representative democracy Cole seems to be somewhat relativistic.⁷⁰ Indeed, a multiplicity of selves is a common touchstone of post-modern theory and pragmatic scepticism. For Cole, however, this is merely a description of a plurality of surface appearances, the motivating force of which is the projection and pursuit of the universal nature of the self.⁷¹ Cole is talking here of people 'being themselves'. His description, of course, rests upon the assumption of a 'themselves' to be realised. No society could exist if there was not such a thing as an active, real self. Society could not be or operate if we were all being a number of other people all the time. We could not communicate, could not co-ordinate activity, and could not organise or wrest our survival from a reluctant world, much less the complex interdependent world we are situated in. Part of the cement which holds this complex, interdependent social world together is fellowship. This fellowship works on two levels at one and the same time. It is a good in itself, sought for its own reward, and it is also, in the action of its being sought, a good; a form of social cement.

⁷⁰ Wright makes the accusation of relativism. Wright, *G. D. H. Cole and Socialist Democracy*, 2.

⁷¹ Cole, *Social Theory*, 49-50.

Fellowship

Fellowship is an element of Cole's equivalent of Dewey's 'democratic faith'. It is, however, rather more affective than Dewey's concept, and considerably more positive than the foundation of Mouffe's rather misanthropic equivalent, as we shall see later. Fellowship is the "mental and moral relations of man to man" which is essential to democracy, and is a far from abstract concept.⁷² It means literal personal comradeship in a small group, such as Cole enjoyed as a politically active student and in the National Guild League.⁷³ It is a warm sense of friendliness, not a "mere recognition, cold as a fish."⁷⁴ As an element of democracy, fellowship is an underlying reinforcement, and consequence of, the capability of self-government realised.⁷⁵ In the context of fellowship, democracy means:

loving your neighbours, or at any rate being ready to love them when you do not happen to dislike them too much - and even then, when they are in trouble, and come to you looking for help and sympathy. A democrat is someone who has a physical glow of sympathy and love for anyone who comes to him honestly, looking for help or sympathy; a man is not a democrat, however justly he may try to behave to his fellow man, unless he feels like that.⁷⁶

Fellowship can also have a broader more attenuated form, with potentially less desirable consequences, which Cole also explores.

In *The World of Labour*, in a passage which begins to defend a role for the state against Syndicalism's total opposition to any role for it at all, Cole includes the encouragement and promotion of "the finer

⁷² Cole, *Essays in Social Theory*, 246.

⁷³ Carpenter, *G.D.H. Cole: An Intellectual Biography*, 247.

⁷⁴ Cole, *Essays in Social Theory*, 247.

⁷⁵ Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 230.

⁷⁶ Cole, *Essays in Social Theory*, 98.

expression of the national life.”⁷⁷ Nowhere, however, does Cole elaborate on these ‘finer expressions’. Nevertheless, this can be taken to indicate a much broader scope of positive aspects of identity and of the obstacles to the good life than Syndicalism is able to allow. Nationalism need not be a destructive quality, but could be a form of Stoic ethic of care for ‘the furthest Mysian’.⁷⁸ Although they rightly identify the most important sphere of human activity as that of production, Syndicalists deny the importance of any other areas.⁷⁹ They can only do this by representing industry and the workplace as the whole of life, which Cole consistently demands is not the case. Compared to production and economic factors, nationality may indeed be relatively secondary, but it still matters “morally, socially and politically.”⁸⁰ The workers’ identification with the ‘higher expression of national life’ must be taken into account. For it is only in including all that people do in their lives, not just work, but other forms of identity formation, that any democracy can be a full and deep one.⁸¹ Democratic theory must be extended, broadened and deepened because the people it seeks to describe and empower are themselves extended, broad and deep.

Human nature often tends to appear in democratic theory, whether or not it is openly admitted, as those needs and desires which make deeper and broader democracy difficult or impossible. Cole tends to concentrate only on those which make it possible. As a normative antidote to ‘dismal science’s’ disregard and traducing of these impulses, this strategy serves a valid and defensible purpose. There is a continuing tradition of this optimistic reclamation of history, where a positive re-conceptualisation enables us to grasp and move

⁷⁷ Cole, *World of Labour*, 26.

⁷⁸ Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 249-52.

⁷⁹ Cole, *World of Labour*, 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸¹ Ghia Nodia, “Nationalism and Democracy,” in *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Nodia makes a strong case for considering nationalism an essential component of democracy. The two may exist in a constant state of tension, but nevertheless, the ‘who’ of democracy needs some container.

forward with a positive, creative and confident vision - the ideal which Cole wished to inform fact-based action. Action informed only by a pessimistic view of human nature can only be partially rational, as well as being a conservative self re-production of existing, limited and limiting conditions. As Cole observed of the potential the Beveridge Report held, utopianism is not foolish dreaming if we have already put our foot on the road in a practical-minded pursuit of a better life.⁸² The good life lies further down the same road.

Capabilities and capacities for self-rule

This holistic view of the human condition, of the needs and desires of individual social agents, was distilled by Cole from his analysis of the vibrant trade union activism in the years before the first world war. The unrest of the labour movement was, however, an unformed, instinctual protest, and he objected to the anarchistic tendencies of syndicalism. What was needed was direction and form for the unrest to achieve the lasting emancipation and self-realisation for the working class. The only direction and form on offer to the labour movement at that time was Fabian collectivism. This was entirely inadequate to Cole's purpose. There were gaps in collectivism's theory which had to be interrogated before the materials at hand for reconstruction could be examined, and a new positive theory developed and deployed.⁸³ It is these 'materials at hand', the very nature of the people instinctively protesting, their capacities and capabilities, which would be taken up by Cole's new positive theory.

Within trade unionism itself there had been the first stirring of a more holistic humanist impulse. Wages remained the core arena of dispute with the employers, but working conditions, working hours,

⁸² Speaking of the Social Dividend after the institution of the Beveridge Report Cole says "what is there Utopian in suggesting that a share in the product of industry ought to accrue to every citizen as a money payment which he can spend freely, as well as in the form of certain freely provided services? It is a further step, I agree; but it is a step on a road on which we have already agreed to travel a good deal of the way." G.D.H. Cole, *Money: Its Present and Future*, 3rd ed. (London: Cassell, 1947), 148.

⁸³ Cole, *World of Labour*, 5.

and what the employers called 'discipline' were increasingly of active concern to the unions. Collective bargaining was being used more and more, not only to improve wages and hours, but on every point of grievance, collective and individual, in the workplace.⁸⁴ There were even the beginnings of a realisation that collective bargaining could be used to push for the active, collective, control of the management of industry itself. A strong element of this nascent union driven movement was the syndicalism of Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, and John Burns, and countless other working class activists.⁸⁵ There is, however, an asymmetry to syndicalism which cannot give the full and deep recognition of these impulses. The shop-floor activists while displaying their competence in diagnosing and prescribing for their ills, remained somewhat clouded by syndicalism's contempt for 'book learning' and philosophy. They were however, in Cole's account, educating themselves in the fellowship and responsibility of democracy.

In her seminal work on participatory democracy, Pateman pictures Cole rather simply as an educationist, and sidesteps his conception of human nature.⁸⁶ Cole does make clear reference to democracy and education, and he insists that popular control of government from without, and democratic control from within, can only be secured by educational methods.⁸⁷ This is not 'Education', as in being instructed or invested in from without, the having of expert knowledge handed down and deposited in workers. It is rather the constant extending, broadening and deepening of the individual through experience, in a similar vein to Dewey's 'growth'. Cole lived and practiced this vision of democratic education in his years at the WEA, freeing and facilitating the students in designing and assessing their own courses

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁵ Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The History of the Transport and General Workers' Union* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900-1914: Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), Tom Mann and John Laurent, *Tom Mann's Social and Economic Writing: A Pre-Syndicalist Selection* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1988).

⁸⁶ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

⁸⁷ Cole, *World of Labour*, 15.

of study. He also appreciated the educative elements of the working lives of his working-class students. He argued that, "every strike, every demand made by the Unions, is a contribution to the education of the worker, as well as an attack on the capitalist system."⁸⁸ Cole talks of the possession of free will in *Social Theory*,⁸⁹ where he observes that human beings are naturally free. That is, of course, not all they are, for they are also 'all around in chains'. The universality Cole claims for individual human beings is overlain with obstacles and denials. Before a fully human life can be realised these occlusions must be cast off.

Class struggle forms the immediate arena in which this occlusion and its shedding takes place. Cole does not embrace class struggle as an ideological article of faith, but because "it is a monstrous and irrefutable fact."⁹⁰ Under capitalism at this time the worker had become so much a worker and very little else. Cole makes a similar point about syndicalism.⁹¹ Syndicalism and capitalism thus share the same limited perspective, reducing human being to mere industrial productivity. Syndicalism can only compete with capitalism on its own terms and has no vision of its own of humanity because it is about control and not about creativity. For freedom to be full and deep we must think outside capitalism's, and syndicalism's, fetishes, and liberate creativity from the deadening toil of wavery.

Basic Income - manumission from wavery

Whilst Syndicalist theorists and collectivists argued about the State, and the worth or otherwise of its coercive power, Cole

⁸⁸ Ibid. This is reminiscent of Luxemburg, who also emphasised the role of trade unions in fostering class consciousness, and the role of free will acting on the world to create socialism. See Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: NLR/Verso, 1976), Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary Alice Waters (New York: 1970).

⁸⁹ Cole, *Social Theory*, 183.

⁹⁰ Cole, *World of Labour*, 21.

⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

recognised that "the world of creative thought" had moved on to other more interesting and relevant problems.⁹² This passage is telling, not so much for its analysis of what was actually occurring, but because it indicates that the relationship between the state and the people was being recast. More specifically, the recasting was not emerging from philosophers, or the politicians of the state, but in the associations of function. The world of creative thought, here counterposed to philosophers and party politicians, is that of the voluntary or functional associations of society, primary amongst them the Guilds and trade unions, some of which were international in character. Most were also made-up of individuals with cross-cutting ties of loyalty. People were busy leading multiple, plural active lives, sometimes beyond national boundaries, whereas the state was still a monolithic central focus of national life. A new relationship between state and individual was needed to reflect and serve this developing social environment. Cole was experimenting with a number of ideas to provide this bridge. The democratic structure of Guild Socialism was only the most widely known, with its gradualistic programme to dissolve the grasp of the state and of capitalism. Less widely known, but designed to serve the cause of deeper democracy was his developing interest in Basic Income.

Various schemes for redistribution or the alleviation of poverty were being floated at that time, by a number of elements of the left, such as Sidney Webb's 'National Minimum', the idea of a 'living wage', and the social credit of Major Douglas. Although first explicitly introduced into Cole's work in 1935, the 'Social Dividend' can be traced back to some nascent precursors in his work as early as 1929.⁹³ In *The Next Ten Years* the idea of providing an unconditional citizen right of a cash payment can be found, where the principle of need "will, if family allowance is introduced, begin to elbow the rival

⁹² Cole, *Social Theory*, 9.

⁹³ Cole, *Principles*, 234. Van Trier locates the origins of BI with a Quaker activist, Dennis Milner, see E. Mabel Milner and Dennis Milner, *Scheme for a State Bonus. A Rational Method of Solving the Social Problem* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1918)., cited in Walter van Trier, "Who Framed 'Social Dividend'?" (paper presented at the First Congress of the U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Network, City University of New York, March 8-9 2002).

principle of payment for economic value received" (i.e., wagers).⁹⁴ Just as education had already been communalised, Cole suggested the possible communalisation of other necessary services, so that, "wages and earnings may come to be only supplementary payments for work, and not the main source of men's livelihood."⁹⁵

Sidney Webb's 'National Minimum' involved no actual payment and was intended as a minimum standard of life below which no one should fall. It was to be ensured by provision in kind only, of education, health etc. This was merely a pragmatic, instrumental choice by the Webbs, to avoid alienating the rich tax-payer and creating social conflict. The 'Living Wage' was, in effect, merely an amelioration of the wage system. It was redistributive, but benefited only wage earners, and it formed an accommodation with the capitalist system. Douglas's 'Social Credit' Movement also avoided any cash payment as it was primarily intended to address the problems of the mining industry by making all consumer goods affordable through subsidy.⁹⁶ Again this leaves the existing degrading system intact. In *The Means to Full Employment* Cole warns his readers not to confuse Douglas's scheme of 'consumer credits' with social dividends.⁹⁷ The former is premised on the belief that there is a lack of purchasing power which can be remedied by creating 'new money'.⁹⁸ What Cole proposed was the socialisation of productive revenue.

Instead of it being paid out in wages, rent, and private profit, the revenue generated by the nation's productive forces - capital, machines, and labour - should be deducted at source and distributed:

not in rewards to the owners of the factors of production, but as 'social dividends' to all members of

⁹⁴ G.D.H. Cole, *The Next Ten Years in British Social and Economic Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 198.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹⁶ G.D.H. Cole, *The Means to Full Employment* (London: Gollancz, 1943), 162.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹⁸ Cole, *Money: Its Present and Future*, 143.

the community as their common birthright in the collective productive capacity of the economic system ... of the social heritage of skill incorporated in the stage of advancement and education reached in the arts of production.⁹⁹

This common heritage was to be distributed in two forms to enable all the available resources of the community and economy to be fully used, for the best possible purpose.¹⁰⁰ Need rather than demand was the primary criteria by which productive effort was to be valued, and the necessities of civilised living would have first claim on the nation's resources.¹⁰¹ So far this was not so different to Sidney Webb's 'Necessary Minimum'. The distinction between necessities and luxuries, however, is not easily made. Cole therefore introduces the concept of 'substitutable necessities'. What the citizen buys was largely their own affair, not the state's, and the more advanced the society the wider the range of choice that would be available. Cole is very keen to protect this aspect of individual choice, which he conceptualises as a subtler category of need. Substitutable necessities are not basic necessities, but it is nevertheless a vital freedom to be able to choose, to be creative in consumption.¹⁰² Cole's reasoning goes deeper than this. If citizens *must* work in order to stand any chance of exercising this aspect of creative freedom, let alone of gaining basic needs, they are little more than slaves. Hence, the ability to *choose work* is at least as important as the ability to choose different cars, clothes, or sofas.

The trade unions had been highly effective in enabling the working class to tap their capability to broaden horizons, to imagine beyond present circumstances and prescribe solutions. The essential freedom of creative active choice was being opened up to the workers by the self-directed activities. In their associations of will they were able to

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ Cole, *Principles*, 220.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 227-28.

draw upon and use their innate ability to create and manage associations which effectively addressed all their needs. This is of course why the employers decried the disruption of 'discipline' in the workplace. The order that served their particular interest, their function as employers was being challenged, not simply through economic demands for higher wages, but through a gathering redefinition by the workers of existing social relationships. In beginning to realise their own identity the working class were also challenging the employers to redefine their human identity.¹⁰³ Through participatory democratic associations and institutions it was Cole's belief that not only the working class, but all of human society could "improve upon Rousseau's ideal ... to secure the realisation, in large measure, of that elusive but fundamental reality which he named the General Will."¹⁰⁴ Note that the General Will of Rousseau's ideal would only be realised 'in large measure'. Cole was sceptical and distrustful of the concept of General Will at the national level, as we observed earlier.

Concluding comments

Throughout his life, as a political activist, an educator, and as a researcher, Cole was pre-occupied with the desire to be useful to the labour movement. His intellectual and organisational efforts found constant expression in concrete policy suggestions attuned to the needs and possibilities of the time. Today he is largely remembered as the architect of the fullest expression of Guild Socialism, or as an historian of the British Socialist movement. In this chapter I have sought to show that Cole was inherently inclined towards essentialism. Indeed, despite the total lack of attention to this thread in his work, I believe that Cole's work was informed by a commitment to a metaphysics of human flourishing. The absence of this position in the literature on Cole, while unfortunate, is not inexplicable, however. Evidence for Cole's

¹⁰³ Cole, *World of Labour*, 29.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

metaphysics is deeply buried in his work. A reluctance to openly discuss metaphysics is not uncommon. Dewey, for instance, was pulled towards something like essentialism by his curiosity and intellect. He was prevented from making the final step over the line by his pragmatic philosophical commitments and the prejudices of the times. Cole, however, on the other side of that line, was reluctant to openly acknowledge essentialism by a mixture of his deep desire to be 'useful' to the labour movement, and his immersion in the English empirical tradition.

This tension in Cole's outlook, between his essentialist instinct and his empiricist environment, found expression in his one major theoretical work, *Social Theory*. Here Cole sought to re-conceptualise our perspective on the actual and the possible, and to show how certain methodologies curtail the terrain of valid debate and vision. Definitions and classifications perspectify the seen world, and condition what are held to be the realistic limits of human possibility, particularly in debate over possible democratic forms. In Cole's view of human activity, he holds that there is an innate urge to express will, and to have it realised in association. Our creativity is an elevated expression of this will, indeed all our work is just such a creative expression of will.¹⁰⁵ Cole's prime examples of social association were the trade unions, which were doubly important for their economic significance, but, many more associations of will are spontaneously formed by people from all walks of life, for all sorts of purposes.

The real surging movement beneath Guild Socialism was the struggle of self-taught workers, rejecting the moral and material promise of capitalism to elaborate a practical and intelligible way towards full human being, with a world to gain, and a positive nature to realise. The Guild Socialists connected with this movement, and came to dominate it for a short time, but as Coates and Topham observe "the most important things they had to teach, they learnt

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

form their working-class pupils."¹⁰⁶ This goes some way to account for Cole's concern to pursue democracy in the particular concrete form of worker's control. Crucial though it is, democracy could not stop in industry. The democratic principle applied "not only or mainly to some special sphere of social action known as 'politics', but to any and every form of social action."¹⁰⁷

Indeed, in every form of social action, outbreaks of democracy continue to surface. That often these outbreaks do not succeed for any length of time does not deny the human capacity to break-out of negative modes of being, it merely points to unfriendly environments. It is not that these outbreaks fail so often that is significant, so much that people try again and again, despite the evidence of their failure. Shallow, empiricist rationality would tend to indicate apathy as the most sensible action, but there is something deeper pushing these impulses to the surface. Much of Cole's effort, therefore, went into helping to make the trade unions equal to the task of resistance and transformation. The absence of an openly theorised ontological depth, however, crucially weakened Cole's analysis of the potential of the times and of the occlusions participatory democracy faced. Through Guild Socialism he sought to bolster the trade union movement with sound and reliable theory, because, "before Labour can control, it must learn how to control."¹⁰⁸ A critical realist analysis would have added a consideration of the obstacles such a learning found. The interaction of the different levels of reality; the empirical, the actual, and the real, would have enabled an adequate analysis of these obstacles. Despite his reluctance to engage with the metaphysical depth of reality, his work nonetheless went a long way to providing these elements.

¹⁰⁶ Ken Coates and Anthony Topham, *Industrial Democracy in Great Britain: A Book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers Control* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), 6.

¹⁰⁷ Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 93.

Chapter 4 - Erich Fromm

This chapter considers Erich Fromm's neglected contribution to political, and more specifically democratic, theory. His concept of social character, and the ideal of the productive character, are examined to build a case for the importance of these considerations in the construction of social and political relations. Fromm is able to produce a history for the social character, which traces its emergence and development. Maccoby claims, however, that there is no such path of emergence for the productive character, because it is "disembodied, without clinical or historical grounding".¹ It is part of this chapter's purpose to challenge this assertion. The chapter will also show that the productive character deserves a central position in the theory of participatory democracy as a contribution to a full conceptualisation of human nature. This challenge is engaged while examining the political and democratic elements of Fromm's work through a confrontation with Maccoby's accusation of messianism against Fromm.² The nature of this 'messianism' is indicated in the final chapter of *To Have or To Be?*, where Fromm distinguishes between "dreaming" and "awake" Utopians, and between "technical" and "human" Utopias.³ Three and a half centuries after Bacon initiated technical science there is, claimed Fromm, the pressing need for a new science; a Humanistic Science of Man. After the long dominance of technical science, which has presented and solved

¹ By a student and collaborator of Fromm's, Michael Maccoby, "The Two Voices of Erich Fromm: Prophet and Analyst," *Society* 32, no. 5[217], July (1995).

² Ibid.

³ The dreamers would be the type of Utopians Marx and Engels railed against (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works: Anti-Duhring; Dialectics of Nature*, vol. 25 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and A. J. P. Taylor, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Penguin Classics* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Books, 1967), 52.), Fromm would class himself amongst the awake Utopians, "who have not given up hope [and] can succeed only if they are hard-headed realists, shed all illusions, and fully appreciate the difficulties." Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (London: Abacus, 1979), 170.

innumerable technical problems, social reconstruction could then begin along humanistic lines. The technical utopia could be replaced with "The *human Utopia* of the Messianic Time" where "a united new humankind living in solidarity and peace, free from economic determination and from war and class struggle can be achieved"⁴. This of course could only be possible if we spent the same energy and intelligence on the realisation of the human Utopia as we have spent on the realisation of the technical. Central to this is a deep knowledge of the human subject.

Fromm's 'Messianic tendency' is in effect an articulation of an open, dynamic account of human possibility. It is better understood as a contribution to a deep and enthusiastic commitment to social science and to a deeper understanding of the human subject of democracy.

I begin by examining Fromm's development of a social psychology, which links social character with material and economic conditions. Fromm formulates the nature of the human dilemma, the contradiction of our existence, giving rise to needs and desires; to counter separateness, to transcend passive creature-ness, to gain some form of human rootedness, a concept of the self, and to make intellectual sense of the world. This is pursued by examining Fromm's application of this social psychology in a diagnosis of the poor state of representative democracy in contemporary society. He shares with Schumpeter a similar analysis of existing democratic practice, as woefully unengaged, ill-informed and elite driven. Fromm, however, reacts to this situation entirely differently to Schumpeter. He is dismayed at the poverty of political participation in an 'economic model'. Instead he places particular importance on economic democracy over an *economic model* of democracy.

⁴ Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 171. This is a similar formulation to Wallerstein's recent intervention, Immanuel Wallerstein, *Utopistics, Or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: The New Press, 1998)., where *Utopistics* is described as " the serious assessment of historical alternatives, ... a sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they could be and the zones open to human creativity... It is thus an exercise simultaneously in science, politics, and in morality." 1-2

Fromm's diagnosis of the state of work in contemporary society is examined as an essential element in any deep democratic society. Industrial democracy is connected with his emphasis on work as an essential element of human life, as a realm of human possibility and creativity. After analysing Fromm's assessment of representative democracy, and the nature of work in capitalist society, the analysis turns to his prescriptions for a humanist society, and participatory democracy.

Fromm makes a number of concrete suggestions aimed at the reinvigoration of democracy. These are intended to transform society from a structure which encourages and inflicts powerlessness, to one where opinion and prejudice are replaced with active convictions and expressions of free will. Some of Fromm's concrete suggestions may, to modern ears, sound anachronistic or even naïve. Maccoby asserts that this is a result of his tendency to exaggerated messianic outbursts, like St Augustine wrestling with his temptations.⁵ These ideas were the product of a thought process developed from certain basic principles, and applied to his own contemporary conditions.⁶ Nonetheless, it cannot be avoided that Fromm was primarily a psychoanalyst and social theorist, not a political theorist. The basic principles on which his political activism sought expression were the conceptualisations of human nature informed by his work as a psychoanalyst. The firm humanistic philosophical basis of these principles guarantee the enduring relevance of Fromm's contribution to democratic theory.

⁵ Maccoby, "The Two Voices of Erich Fromm," 79.

⁶ Wilde provides an account of Fromm's interest in the recurrent thirst for human freedom, often expressed in the religious impulse. Lawrence Wilde, "Against Idolatry: The Humanist Ethics of Erich Fromm," in *Marxism's Ethical Thinkers*, ed. Lawrence Wilde (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

Developing a psychology of the social

Fromm began his academic career in the field of sociology, gaining a doctorate at Heidelberg in 1922. He then undertook psychoanalytic training in Munich, Frankfurt, and Berlin,⁷ and at the end of the 1920's, after playing a significant role in organising the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute, he joined the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. While there, directing the social psychology section, he produced psychological research into the rise of Nazism, and the authoritarian character.⁸

The original aim of the Frankfurt Institute was to develop an interdisciplinary approach to social science, linking philosophy and empirical analysis.⁹ The intention was to overcome the limited scientism of contemporary social research which held to the positivist dogma of separating 'fact' from 'value'. All of Fromm's work contained this commitment to scientific empirical inquiry infused with a normative component. His earliest published work emphasised that psychology cannot be detached from sociology.¹⁰ These papers begin to engage with the themes which occupied so much of his life's work. Fromm remained vitally concerned with the links between the economic and the psychological spheres, how mental and emotional arrangements affect the development of society (and visa-versa), and the extent to which psychology can assist the political confrontation with inhuman conditions.¹¹ Fromm's major contribution to this

⁷ Daniel Burston, "A Profile of Erich Fromm," *Society* 28, no. 4[192], May-June (1991).

⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*, trans. Barbara Weinberger (1984).

⁹ Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1996). This remains the best history of the Frankfurt School.

¹⁰ Erich Fromm, "The Dogma of Christ," in *The Dogma of Christ, and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963[1930]), Erich Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970[1932]), Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology," in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970[1932]).

¹¹ Stephen Eric Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 212.

interdisciplinary project was his part in the effort to merge the insights of Freud into human motivation, and Marx's social and political explanations of the progress of history and analysis of capitalism. Particularly, he sought to describe the mechanisms by which structural social conditions were transmitted to, or found expression in, the individual subject of those social conditions. Central to this was his concept of the social character, and his own innovation - adding to the Freudian categories of character - the *marketing character*, peculiar to twentieth century capitalist society.

Social Character, and the Productive Ideal

In providing a synthesis of the work of Marx and Freud, Erich Fromm offers a basis upon which the possibility of radical social change might develop.¹² This demanded the supplementing of historical materialist theory with a thorough understanding of the psychological situation of individuals and social classes. The key to this synthesis lay in a psychoanalytic conception of character, which led to the development from an *individual* to a *social* psychology.

In moving from a concentration on the individual to the social and the character traits common to a social grouping, Fromm initially focused on 'the libidinal structure of society'.¹³ Later, in *Escape from Freedom*, he discarded Freud's libido theory as an inadequate explanation for social and economic structure. Instead he formulated social character as "specific kinds of a person's relatedness to the world."¹⁴ The task of social psychology was to explain shared, socially relevant, psychological attitudes and ideologies. The primary formative factors were economic conditions which were the

¹² There were a number of scholars attempting this in the 1920's & 30's; Otto Fenichel, Siegfried Bernfeld, Wilhelm Reich.

¹³ Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," 121.

¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971 [1949]), 66.

unconscious roots influencing libido strivings.¹⁵ In effect, Fromm successfully integrated Marx's claim, that the economic and social structure of society are powerful forces shaping human consciousness, into analytic theory. Freudian psychoanalysis had claimed that individual character is formed in early childhood, a time where social contact is limited. How then do social and socio-economic conditions influence the individual character?

Fromm brings our attention to the child's first social environment, the family, where character traits, attitudes and ideologies typical of a social class are communicated to the individual child. Freud had established the primal influence of the family environment, but he failed to recognise that the family itself is shaped and conditioned by external social and economic forces. In effect the family is the psychological agent of society. Shaped and shaping, the family is the medium through which the social structure gives its cast to the character, and thus the consciousness, of its individual members. In considering Freud's libido theory, Fromm found instinct an inadequate explanation for the powerful and pervasive nature of human striving, "Even if a man's hunger and thirst and his sexual strivings are completely satisfied 'he' is not satisfied."¹⁶ The most compelling problems human being faces are not solved by the satisfaction of the 'animal instincts'. That is the point at which they begin. Freud's explanation was therefore too mechanistic for Fromm. It was static and quantitative, whereas the human individual, he argued, is not a closed system of fixed drives whose character can be explained within a quantitative framework. Humans are social creatures whose being is constituted in their social relationships.¹⁷ In the constant search for meaning, in relation to specific social conditions, *both* social conditions *and* the individual remain open 'systems'.

¹⁵ Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology." (originally published in 1930-2)

¹⁶ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 54.

¹⁷ See also Richard Lichtman, *The Production of Desire: The Integration of Psychoanalysis into Marxist Theory* (New York; London: Free Press: Collier Macmillan, 1982)., Chpt. 2 & 3

Instincts, in the form of social character, are moulded to the particular needs of particular economic and social conditions. The psyche does what it needs to do in order to survive in the material world in which it finds itself. Although this highlights the plasticity of the instincts, Fromm is insistent that "the instinctual apparatus, both quantitatively and qualitatively, has certain physiologically and biologically determined limits to its modifiability and that only within these limits is it subject to the influence of social forces."¹⁸ From this he retains a radical psychological analysis without losing the individual in a thicket of sociologising. Fromm was accused by Marcuse of abandoning a critique of the origins and legitimacy of repressive civilisation along with Freud's libido theory.¹⁹ In rejecting Freud's theory of culture, however, Fromm echoes Marx and Engels, for whom consciousness is conditioned by social organisation, which in turn is itself determined by objectively given material conditions.

Through the specific nature and quality of our experience of other people character structure evolves. It is worth quoting Fromm where he sets out the context of the development of social character. This passage shows how individual child development might communicate apathetic or subordinate political activity:

[The child's] feeling of his own strength is weakened by fear, if his initiative and self-confidence are paralysed, if hostility develops and is repressed, and if at the same time his father or mother offers affection or care under the condition of surrender, such a constellation leads to an attitude in which active mastery is given up and all his energies are turned in the direction of outside sources from which fulfilment of all wishes will eventually come.²⁰

¹⁸ Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," 120-21.

¹⁹ "revisionist sociology accepts the foundation on which these institutions rest... as finished products ... given rather than made facts". Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

²⁰ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971[1941]), 139.

The oral receptive character, for instance, will develop from such a process and not from the blocking or frustration of instinctual drives, but from embedded social inter-relationships. Through a similar process the productive character is blocked and the marketing character prospers. In political terms the subordination essential to elite representative democracy will find the ideal citizen produced by the stressed-out and consumerist parent.

Fromm asserts that people will endeavour to escape a sense of isolation by conforming, giving up their individuality and becoming what others desire them to be. For the marketing character, the self is experienced as a commodity whose value and meaning are externally determined: "I am as you desire me to be".²¹ While some degree of conformity makes social life possible, that we may rely on others to behave in certain ways, for instance, "unthinking conformity can result in missed opportunities for the expression of our unique sense of individuality."²² Western consumer society needs, and creates, people with an exaggerated value for speed and activity, a pervasive need for possessions and an endless desire to consume, no deep feelings or convictions, standardised tastes, and an uncritical suggestibility. Such people possess the 'marketing character' of "homo consumens ... a total consumer ... for whom everything becomes an object of consumption".²³ By identifying the processes which block or absent flourishing, Fromm is able to indicate alternative processes which would serve to foster it.

There is another element in play here; that of human nature which places finite limits on the plasticity of the instincts. As Fromm observes, "Man's instinctual apparatus is one of the 'natural' conditions that form part of the substructure of the social process."²⁴ Thus human nature is one of the factors of the social environment. Rather than individual consciousness directly reflecting economic

²¹ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 73.

²² Rainer Funk, ed., *The Essential Fromm* (London: Constable, 1993), 67.

²³ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁴ Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," 127.

conditions, social character is the mediating link between the economic substructure and prevailing attitudes and ideologies. Human drives, the 'instinctual apparatus', will however, dynamically adapt to socio-economic conditions to try to ensure psychological survival. The product of this reflexive, iterated process, is social character and this directly conditions consciousness.

Thus it can be seen how the social effect of an idea, a policy or a movement, will differ under different social conditions. The picture is further elaborated as social character will also become an active force in the social process. The new social character that resulted from the decline of feudalism, for example, became itself an influential force in further social and economic development. Those very qualities which were rooted in this particular character structure; an internal compulsion to work, a passion for thrift, the readiness to make one's life a tool for the purposes of an extra-personal power, asceticism, and a compulsive sense of duty, were all traits which became valuable forces in capitalistic society.²⁵ Social character is shaped in accordance with the needs of particular economic systems, with the needs for psychic and material survival in the social structures in which we find ourselves. External social and material necessities are internalised in the form of drives. This is required so that the individual can act, as they have to act, if they and their society are to continue to function. This process can also, however, undermine a society as well as stabilise it.

As economic and social factors develop, the character traits that have become cemented into individuals present a destabilising blockage to both individual and society. The satisfactions of operating in one character become blocked, or inappropriate to changed and changing conditions. These existing character traits are no longer useful, and rather than being stabilising can become socially destructive.²⁶ For Fromm the key to human psychology does not lie in our biological drives, but in the fact that we possess, in

²⁵ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126-27.

addition to instincts, the specifically human traits of self-awareness, reason, and imagination. These traits give rise to existential needs for meaning, of "relatedness", "effectiveness", "a frame of orientation and devotion" that must be met to ensure psychic survival.²⁷ There are positive aspects to each social character which, under the stress of changing social and economic environments, will become useful aspects of the next social character. This process is in the last instance, however, considerably moderated and refined by the persistence of particular human needs, of human nature.

The way in which our enduring psychic needs can be satisfied are diverse and the difference between various ways of satisfaction is equivalent to the difference between various degrees of mental health.²⁸ Some ways of accommodating or realising our enduring psychic needs are better than others. Some lead to self-realisation of capacities and talents, others lead to sterility and suffering. The means by which these needs are met are largely conditioned by or contained within the socio-economic environment.

Thus different social orders can be assessed by how they promote or mutilate beneficial answers to the various existential needs. People will adapt to the conditions they find themselves in, and human nature will thus change and adapt its surface appearance. Human nature and human being are not, however, infinitely adaptable. For Fromm:

Despots and ruling cliques can succeed in dominating and exploiting their fellow man, but they cannot prevent *reactions* to this inhuman treatment. Their subjects become frightened, suspicious, lonely and, if not due to external reasons, their systems collapse at some point because fears, suspicions and loneliness eventually incapacitate the majority to function effectively and intelligently.²⁹

²⁷ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

This is where a 'history' of the productive character can begin, in the *reaction* to absencing conditions, the reaction of contradictory impulses in a reflexive relationship to pre-existing conditions. Choices are to be made between deterioration in conditions contrary to human nature, where hate and destructiveness can develop to such an extent that the rulers, their social order or the human subjects themselves are destroyed, or the production of conditions which are more in accordance with human needs, and a society more in tune with human creative impulses can be developed.

Existential needs

There is, however, a potential problem with Fromm's use of the term *productive character*. 'Productive' can be taken to refer to, and is by Marcuse, the values used by capital, of "the healthy individual under the performance principle".³⁰ Fromm's intended meaning, however, could not be further from the values of bourgeois business. The productive character is an attitude towards life, the non-human world, and humankind which allows the development of each individual's full potentiality. In Henry Pachter's words, this understanding of productive activity "is what Friedrich Schiller and Huizinga call 'play', and no sadder indictment of our alienation could be found than this lack of a proper word for our most profound yearning and the central conception of a non-alienated self-realisation."³¹ It is this sense of productive play, of an open, active loving relationship to life and each other which Fromm identifies as a central need of human being.³²

It is clear that in common with Marx, and indeed with Dewey, Fromm believes that there is no fixed human nature. Human beings are not, however, infinitely malleable. Although human nature is the

³⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236.

³¹ Pachter, Henry 'The Insane Society' *Dissent* III(I) 1956 p88 cited in John Rickert, "The Fromm-Marcuse Debate Revisited," *Theory and Society* 15, no. 3 (1986): 374. See also Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 89-113.

³² Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 113, 67-68, 94, Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 96-97.

product of historical evolution, there are certain inherent law-like mechanisms which hold.³³ In effect human nature is one of the "natural conditions" forming part of the substructure of the social process.³⁴ Social character is the coalescence at the intersection of two irreducible dimensions, the social structure and "the nature of man".³⁵

Detailed accounts of human nature can be found in a number of Fromm's works. In *The Sane Society*, Fromm is concerned with what a sane society would look like, in *Man for Himself* his is concerned with ethics and moral values of a good human life, and in *The Heart of Man* this takes the form of an Aristotelian eudemonia. When Fromm looks at democracy, work, and society, what he discerns is a "pathology of normalcy".³⁶ Many psychoanalysts and psychologists, to which should be added political scientists and theorists of democracy, refuse to consider that a whole society may be lacking in sanity.³⁷ For them the extent of the mental health challenge in a society consists solely in the number of 'unadjusted' individuals there are, and not in a possible 'unadjustment' of the culture itself.³⁸ Fromm is here setting out his stall in competition with the pervasive ideology of individualism and atomism, of seeing only collections of isolated incidents. Being a Marxist, Fromm takes a holistic, dialectical view of society. The atomistic view is an example of the epistemological fallacy - an inability or refusal to view present conditions as anything but the all of it, the 'natural' state.

In all psychoanalysis there is an implicit position of *normative humanism*. The psychoanalyst's mission to 'cure' must rest on such a conception, whether this is an overt view of a healthy individual or a

³³ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 29.

³⁴ Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology."

³⁵ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 32-37.

consensual view of normality.³⁹ In examining the concept of a sane society, Fromm's normative humanism presupposes society as a real thing. In addition, as well as shared anatomical and physiological similarities, human beings also share basic psychic qualities in common, of mental and emotional functioning. Our biological and social elements are not separate, but each are elements of the other. The *total existence* of a human being contributes to their passions and drives, some of which can be healthy and productive, whilst others can be unhealthy and destructive. Which of the passions and drives comes to the fore largely depends on the socio-cultural/socio-economic conditions which prevail. In Fromm's human nature there is no privileging of a 'good' or a 'bad' reading of human nature.⁴⁰ Both are there, but the overall balance can be more or less healthy/happy, "the criterion of mental health is not one of individual adjustment to a given social order, but a universal one, valid for all men, of giving a satisfying answer to the problem of human existence."⁴¹ The mental health and the well-being of each individual is inseparable from that of each other person in that society. Fromm's Aristotelian eudemonism, while being that of the individual good life, is also necessarily a societal eudemonism.

This insight and formulation has consequences for the view of causation in democratic theory. Dewey, for instance, talks about the *consequences* of human activity, which is a relatively passive and fatalistic term indicating a directionless, free-floating movement to human affairs. This leaves his idea of growth somewhat anaemic, as he insists on no human nature, no ground from which action springs.⁴² Fromm, however, emphasises the eventual reaction to imposed or pre-existing conditions. Ends and means remain linked, as in Dewey, but there are ends about which valid hypotheses can be made. Utopias are such hypotheses, which keep alive a faith in the future of humanity and make real contributions to the progress of thought.

³⁹ Nick Totton, *Psychotherapy and Politics* (London: Sage, 2000), 2.

⁴⁰ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 210-25.

⁴¹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 14.

⁴² Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 28-30. see also Dewey, "Human Nature and Conduct," MW14:28.

Fromm's work forms a version of *utopistics*, a science of the possible, premised on knowledge of the actual.⁴³

As embodied physiological creatures, human beings belong to the animal kingdom, and are subject to their unreasoning instincts. The animal is a part of nature, its own and its environment, and never transcends it. There is a harmony between the animal and the natural environment in which it is equipped to survive, thus the animal 'is lived through' the 'given' of its biology and its natural environment.⁴⁴ When life, however, becomes aware of itself, it transcends nature. This is not to say that 'man' is superior, above or beyond nature. The human species remains a part of nature, subject to its physical 'laws' and unable to change them, but it is *also* set apart from it. Human kind "is homeless, yet chained to the home [it] shares with all creatures."⁴⁵ Thus Fromm's humanism offers a route of engagement with ecological theory and a moral philosophy of intrinsic worth.⁴⁶ Human beings cannot rid themselves of their minds anymore than they can rid themselves of their bodies. Nor can they rid themselves of the wider 'natural' world, however-much some, in extremis, may try, or however-much technology may appear to offer such a possibility.⁴⁷ We will always remain embodied beings.

Fromm thus believes he has overcome a dilemma he identifies in Marx's writings, on the nature of man. Marx's homo faber is an animal which produces with imagination and foresight, but he wavered between an ahistorical essence of the uncrippled man, and an insistence on the self-made nature of man in the process of history. Fromm's solution is to define "the essence of man, not as a given quality or substance, but as a *contradiction inherent in the*

⁴³ Wallerstein, *Utopistics*, 2.

⁴⁴ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 22-23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁶ Collier, *Being and Worth*. The concept of intrinsic worth will be examined in the final chapter.

⁴⁷ See for instance, Zizek, "Bring Me My Philips Mental Jacket.", in response to Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*.

human condition.”⁴⁸ This contradiction means that there is an inescapable alternative facing each of us, and all of us - to progress or regress - to live-out the search for a human world (a home) beyond our animal existence, or deny our human exceptionalism and regress to the animal. He has of course already said that we cannot really do the latter, this is our curse and blessing. We will always think, imagine, and reason. Unless the insanity takes over and we destroy ourselves and our planet.

All essentially human yearnings, other than animal, physiological cravings; of hunger, thirst, and sex, are determined by the polarity between regression to animal existence and progression to (fully) human existence. The one leads to suffering and mental illness, the other is also frightening and painful. A step into the unknown. Human beings have to solve a problem, and “can never rest in the given situation of a passive adaptation to nature. Even the most complete satisfaction of all [our] instinctive needs [do] not solve [our] *human problem*”.⁴⁹ Our most acute passions and needs are not those with their origin in our bodies, but those rooted in the peculiarity of our existence.

From psychoanalytical to political practice

Fromm, however, was not satisfied with mere description and theoretical analysis. He was also deeply concerned, as both a practising psychoanalyst and a political activist, with finding solutions, cures even, to the social, political and individual ills so clearly revealed. His desire was to encourage conditions which could foster and maintain a fully human life, in contrast to the unhealthy and thwarted psychic lives of contemporary society. To produce in fact a *Sane Society*, and replace the marketing character with a productive one. The *productive character* would be the form in which the self-realisation of the potential immanent in human beings would

⁴⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (Evanston, NY: Harper & Row, 1964), 149.

⁴⁹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 28.

find expression. Central to this transformation would be a democracy of participation, a good in itself and for its policy outcomes, encompassing both political and economic activity as essential human concerns.

In tracing the links between socio-economic structures and individual agency, through the concept of social character, Fromm produced a body of work which Michael Maccoby describes as "deep[ening] our understanding of the relationship between society and human motivation, passions, and ideals."⁵⁰ Maccoby is also, however, less impressed with Fromm's examples of the ideal human condition - the productive character - initially the creative artist, latterly Zen masters and Christian mystics (and Karl Marx, a 'modern prophet'). He claims that the creative artist as a role model is a non-runner as "it requires uncommon talents that most people lack."⁵¹ Despite his valid observation that many artists maintain a single-minded dedication against indifference and rejection, and often display unloving behaviour, and that Fromm does not refer to a single example of an actual creative artist, Maccoby misses the point somewhat. As Wilde points out, radical artists occupy "a highly antagonistic and isolated position" in alienated societies.⁵² Maccoby, however, confuses the personality and lives of particular artists, in a technical Utopia, with the creative impulse as such. All people display creativity throughout their lives, and all people have the capacity to give expression to their thoughts and passions. They may not ever have been encouraged to see this as creativity, much less as artistic, but it is there. The tyranny of seeing artistic talent only as

⁵⁰ Michael Maccoby, "Social Character Versus the Productive Ideal: The Contradiction in Fromm's View of Man," *Praxis International* 2, no. 1 (1982): 70.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 78. Many democratic theorists cite the creative artist as a model, Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Rev. ed. (London: Merlin Press, c1977, 1977), 655-67. G.D.H. Cole, "William Morris and the Modern World," in *Persons and Periods: Studies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945).

⁵² Wilde, "Against Idolatry: The Humanist Ethics of Erich Fromm," 80-81.

the ability to draw an accurate likeness is surely outdated, and is a thoroughly undemocratic sentiment.

Maccoby also expresses a conservative elitism when he protests about the models of Zen masters and Christian mystics. Again this is a valid concern, but he proceeds to undermine his observation that Fromm's models were misleading and even elitist by criticizing that, "they do not persuade or inspire the more productive examples of the modern social character who are more flexible and participative, oriented to a world of science and technology rather than the mystical life."⁵³ Maccoby is an awake Utopian, in the technical Utopia where the modern social character is the marketing character. He also observes that Fromm did not "even try to describe 'productive' examples of marketing man."⁵⁴ This seems odd. Marketing character is the embodiment of alienated humanity, a character embedded in an instrumental, capitalist consumer society. The consequences and price society pays for this character development form the bulk of *The Sane Society*, and *Man for Himself*. The positive aspects that Fromm identifies and seeks to foster are the remnants of humanism and perverted acts of resistance. This is where the productive character would come from, through the valorisation of the creativity which people somehow manage to liberate from 'marketing', the loving productive moments they are able to preserve against a deadening system. The positive aspects that Maccoby identifies, such as flexibility, and a more open sociability, may become goods of a humanist society, just as they already are of a consumerist, neo-liberal one. Without an appreciation of the human nature pushing social development, and the instrumental, technological elements squeezing it, however, these positive aspects cannot contribute productively to a humane, humanist society.

Contained in Fromm's largely ignored political writings are some indications of existential and concrete paths to the productive character. In these, his psychoanalytical work with individuals, his

⁵³ Maccoby, "Social Character Versus the Productive Ideal," 78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 80.

background in Jewish religious culture and his later religious preoccupations, together with his political activity meld in an overt account of human nature and socio-political necessity. In exploring these issues, the criticisms levelled against Fromm by a number of Marxists, that he mutilated Freud's theory, and that he had in effect created a reactionary and conservative political theory, will be refuted.⁵⁵ Initially I examine how Fromm interpreted the political and economic scene around him. I will then look at his suggestions for humanising the political and economic realms towards a radical socialist humanism. Interspersed through this discussion, in order to emphasise the enduring relevance of his ideas and analysis, examples of current political activity will be drawn upon.

Diagnosing democracy

Although much of Fromm's work was concerned to reveal the illusory nature of freedom in contemporary liberal democracy, he never lost sight of the fact that the democracy we have (such as it is) constitutes a real and significant progression from arbitrary and authoritarian rule. He did not underestimate the value of the universal franchise and of citizen rights guaranteed by law, including the principle recently so under attack from neo-liberalism, of a social responsibility for welfare.⁵⁶ In fact he firmly believed that these measures should be valued, strengthened, and extended.⁵⁷

For Fromm, however, modern liberal democracy fails to live up to its promise. The potential for liberating creative power which democracy has rarely progresses beyond a promise for too many people. Powerlessness in an irrational, chaotic and unpredictable world is the everyday experience of many, which political democracy has largely failed to counter. Fromm's motivation was to find ways to rediscover the potential of the democratic ideal, make it real, and to

⁵⁵ This accusation is particularly strong in Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*.

⁵⁶ Michael Barratt Brown, *Redistribution: The Silent Counter-Revolution, Socialist Renewal* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2003).

⁵⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1991 [1942]), 234.

breathe new life into and extend democracy. The politics which the deadening pathology of bureaucracy manages for representative democracies could be employed to serve rather than control people.⁵⁸

The most immediately pressing extension of democracy would be to the economic realm, as “[p]rogress for democracy lies in enhancing the actual freedom, initiative, and spontaneity of the individual, ...above all in the activity fundamental to every man’s existence, his work.”⁵⁹ Political democracy alone is insufficient to undo “the consequences of the economic insignificance”⁶⁰ of people attempting to survive in capitalist societies. One, admittedly, problematic and paradox ridden solution to this situation would be a form of planned economy. Yet for Fromm planning itself is not the solution, but a concentration of the problem,⁶¹ unless it is an active, decentralised, or at least radically consultative planning. The key to solving the paradox of centralised planning and decentralised activity lies for Fromm in a humanism based on “faith in the people, in their capacity to take care of their real interests as human beings.”⁶² Fromm draws upon a deep knowledge of us as human creatures in this faith. The enthusiastic application of human ingenuity and intelligence to the gathering and spreading of such knowledge was one of his life-long goals. The human ability to solve problems is already more than proven. The conquest of nature in so many areas indicates this, but what is needed is an informed balance between nature, human nature, and human society.

Hence, what is key to Fromm’s work is the realisation that technical problems of many sorts have been solved by human ingenuity, but that human problems appear to have been ignored in

⁵⁸ ‘Governance’ or ‘governmentality’ is the current term to describe this process, the explication of which takes up vast amounts of paper; theories of resistance or solution are much less forthcoming. See Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 234-5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁶¹ The experience of the Soviet Union is a stark lesson here.

⁶² Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 237.

favour of a narrowly productive instrumentality.⁶³ His isolation of the concept of human nature locates our essential motivation in the contradiction between our minimal instinctual determination as a particular sort of animal, and our optimum development of intelligence or brain power. These two quantitative factors produce qualitative changes in our animal evolution. Uniquely humanity is animal life aware of itself. For Fromm, humanity's essential nature is not any collection of, or any single 'object' such as selfishness or altruism, but the contradiction between these two empirical factors, a contradiction which demands a solution.⁶⁴ Humanity has the intelligence and skills to solve the problems of its existence, but we also have psychic needs, 'human necessities', the satisfaction of which take on frames of orientation embedded in the particularities of our social existence.

This is why a democracy of participation is of such importance. Human beings are necessarily social creatures, living in vastly complicated, interdependently overlapping conditions. Some of these conditions pre-exist us as individuals, others are within our ambit of influence, but all of these social circumstances and frameworks condition in some way our social and individual character. The democracy which Fromm observed around him offered little in the way of opportunity to develop unalienated, productive or sane solutions to the contradiction of our existence.

After the second world war, however, there was a moment when a flowering of social democratic regimes, committed to subordinating the economic realm to the service of human values, offered the possibility of something of Fromm's vision. Unfortunately, some of this flowering was the result of the global power-politics between the USA and the USSR. As a consequence, much of the impetus for European social democracy and welfarism came from an American interest in building a fire-wall against Soviet communism. This

⁶³ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 170-71.

⁶⁴ "life becomes... a problem which must be solved." Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 379., also Erich Fromm, *Human Nature and Social Theory* (1969 [cited 3 January 2002]); available from <http://www.marx.org/archive/fromm/works/1969/human.htm>.

instrumental pragmatism affected the substance of the agenda it initiated, denuding it of much of its possible humanist potential. The goal of European socialist democracy was lost in the day-to-day pragmatism of immediate power-play politics.⁶⁵ Fromm's recognition of this and his analysis of the state of western democracy appears in *The Sane Society*, where ironically he shares much of Joseph Schumpeter's analysis of the realities of the situation, and this warrants an interesting comparison.⁶⁶ Schumpeter's aim is to expose the unrealistic pretensions and dangerous illusions of what he calls 'the classical doctrine of democracy'. He defines this as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realise the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will."⁶⁷ The notion that there is a classical democracy is a nonsense, and in cobbling together disparate elements of Rousseau, and of J.S. Mill he is creating a straw man easily knocked down.⁶⁸

Schumpeter emphasises the difference between the personal concerns of family and business, although paid labour is not mentioned, and the more removed concerns of national and international affairs. He notes that only the impinging on the consciousness of private interests matches the immediate depth of concern required by the classical doctrine. This, claims Schumpeter, accounts for a reduced sense of responsibility and an absence of effective democratic will. There are opinions, dreams, and wishes, but nothing approaching volition, "the psychic counterpart of purposeful responsible action."⁶⁹ More than this though, for Schumpeter such a position is unavoidable. As well as separate

⁶⁵ Stephen Padgett and William Paterson, *A History of Social Democracy in Postwar Europe* (London: Longman, 1991), Lawrence Wilde, *Modern European Socialism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994).

⁶⁶ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ See Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 17.

⁶⁹ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 261. quoted in Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 189.

realms of public/private, he also draws upon the concepts of immediate empiricism and atomistic individualism when he insists that, "without the initiative that comes from immediate responsibility, ignorance will persist in the face of masses of information however complete and correct."⁷⁰ Schumpeter sees no consensus on anything resembling a common will or a common good. Therefore, to believe that the democratic process could represent a moment of realisation or expression of such a will, is a nonsense. Instead, using the tools from his economics toolbox he re-defines the existing democratic process in an economic model. Schumpeter's citizens are uninterested in politics, and remain so un-informed as to maintain an infantile level of engagement in the vital political affairs of their daily life.⁷¹ What is left are political parties competing like commercial corporations for the fleeting attention of their customers in a market-place, with image projection, catch phrases, and 'unique selling points' as the only way in which to communicate with the electorate. This affects in turn what those electors/customers come to expect, demand, and settle for from the process; narrow instrumental, short-term satisfactions, and product performance results.

Fromm also remarks that while citizens might believe that they are participating in the decisions of their country at elections, they actually do little more than an individual shareholder does when voting at an annual general meeting together with the giant corporate shareholders of the company they all 'own'.⁷² The company has a purpose removed from any expression of an individual or group-will outside of itself. There *is* an arcane connection between the acts of voting and decision, but it is a remote and highly attenuated one, and in no way could decisions of state be called an outcome of the voter's will. This is how a deep-seated sense of powerlessness and

⁷⁰ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 262. quoted in Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 188.

⁷¹ Erich Fromm, "Infantilization and Despair Masquerading as Radicalism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 10, no. 2, May (1993).

⁷² Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

irrelevance in political matters develops. Although (writing in 1955) Fromm allows that this might well be an unconscious sense. Today it would be a much more conscious feeling of powerlessness and distance from politics, politicians, and the electoral process, as evidenced by the ever falling turnout in elections throughout the liberal democratic world. Further, he observes, this removed and attenuated relationship is the process through which political intelligence is cumulatively reduced.

So just as Schumpeter observes that lack of immediate responsibility produces a lack of initiative, Fromm also observes that citizens' thinking may well have become impoverished. For Schumpeter the citizen, in political matters "argues and analyses in a way he [himself] would readily recognise as infantile" in other matters, to such an extent the citizen "becomes a primitive again."⁷³ Fromm observes, however, that while thinking must precede effective action, "if one cannot act effectively - one cannot think productively either."⁷⁴ Fromm's commitment to a 'thick' conceptualisation of human nature enables him to remain optimistic about human prospects. Beneath the surface appearance of apathy and ignorance his theory is able to appreciate an emergent creativity and sanity which Schumpeter is unable to conceive of.

Fromm abhors these limitations and recognises their unhealthy effects on human flourishing, and the potential such a situation has for crisis and destructive failure. He does not accept that this is all we can hope for from a democracy and strongly protests that change for the better is possible.⁷⁵ There is, Fromm asserts, a political consciousness within people, and it is linked to political mechanisms and their outcomes. This link is so attenuated by present socio-economic conditions and political institutions, however, that a sense of political helplessness and powerlessness is fostered. It is these

⁷³ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 262. cited in Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 189.

⁷⁴ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 191.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

changeable, external conditions which produce the effects Schumpeter accepts as 'facts of the matter'.⁷⁶

Diagnosing work

Parallel to this analysis of representative democracy, Fromm discusses the impoverished state of working life in its contemporary form. Just as liberal representative democracy signifies an alienated, and alienating, process so does work. For Fromm work is an essential component in the life of the individual, society, and species. He concurred with much of Marx's conceptualisation of the uniqueness of the human creature lying in part in our capacity and need for productive work. The human being is "an animal that produces with foresight and imagination".⁷⁷ The imaginative element here is not only the ability to picture alternative futures but also our ability to think and act creatively, and to bring into being entirely new things. In this way the world comes into some correspondence with our imagination.

This ideal is, however, paralysed by the fragmentation of 'Taylorised' processes of life and experience, into separate parts, each treated discretely as 'facts' to be stored in an 'informed' mind, and as events presented on the same flat plane of the TV, magazine or 'news'paper. As Fromm observes, "Facts lose their specific quality which they can have only as parts of a structuralized whole and retain merely an abstract, quantitative meaning; each fact is just *another* fact and all that matters is whether we know more or less."⁷⁸ Just as this is so of culture, entertainment and education, so it is of the life of work, where divisions of labour, for efficiency's sake,

⁷⁶ There is a strong link here to the psychological concept of learned helplessness M.E.P. Seligman and S.F. Maier, "Failure to Escape Traumatic Shock," *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 74 (1967)., see Prilleltensky and Gonick for an application of this to political theory. Issac Prilleltensky and Lev Gonick, "Politics Change, Oppression Remains: On the Psychology and Politics of Oppression," *Political Psychology* 17, no. 1 (1996).

⁷⁷ Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, 116.

⁷⁸ Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 216.

fragment our creative abilities.⁷⁹ In attempting to find some security in the chaotic appearance of a neo-liberal, capitalist world, where creative thought is systematically frustrated, we lose our spontaneity and individuality by adopting ready-made goals and values.⁸⁰ The result is "a thwarting of life",⁸¹ where we may be alive biologically, but are dead emotionally and creatively. Freedom and individuality become expressed in the pursuit of surrogate excitement and a life lived vicariously through the celebrated and notorious.⁸²

For the human creature, work is an inescapable necessity, but in producing our 'living' and our world, we are partially removed from an 'animal' existence. Work is more than a biological necessity. It is also our liberator *from* nature, and our (self)creator as independent beings.⁸³ We emerge from nature, that around us and our own, by mastering it. This separation cannot, however, be complete, as we unite again with (our)nature in re-creating it again. Mastery here for Fromm is not domination, but indicates the mastering, for instance, of a musical instrument, or a craft. His (and Morris's) ideal of unalienated work is in the likeness of creative artists or the craftsmen who worked on the great Gothic cathedrals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where work and culture were united, and work could indeed be creative self-expression.⁸⁴ For Fromm, this ideal is central to what it is to be human. The creative transformation of nature, as self-realising activity through the individual control of creative acts, in production of necessities, of culture, and the surroundings of human life are the central features of that unique human being. The 'is' of biological and physiological

⁷⁹ G.D.H. Cole, following the work of William Morris objected to this distinction in much the same terms as Fromm.

⁸⁰ Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 219-20.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁸² See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

⁸³ Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 178.

⁸⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 187n, Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 178. For a discussion of Fromm's stance on mastering nature, see Lawrence Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and Its Radical Critics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

necessity thus produces the 'ought' of individual control and creative realisation. Here *ought* is used in the sense of 'owed', to the self and the body, in an internal teleology of self-realisation.⁸⁵ The technical, social, and economic division of labour, however, sunders this 'natural' connection.

Fromm is certainly correct to suggest that the experience of work becomes for the vast majority, blue and white collar, highly and poorly paid, a deadening toil, a form of forced labour to be avoided or escaped gratefully. The ideas he was articulating fifty years ago are at least as relevant today as they were then.⁸⁶ Fromm observed that "dissatisfaction, apathy, boredom, lack of joy and happiness, a sense of futility and a vague feeling that life is meaningless" are the unavoidable results of the instrumentalisation of work.⁸⁷ In *The Sane Society* he derides the application of industrial psychology to the alienated, capitalist workplace. Psychological amelioration of conditions in the workplace to make workers happy, such as background 'muzac', and painting walls 'calming' or 'creative' colours, are merely manipulation of the "human problem of industry".⁸⁸ This application of 'human relations' theory actually "means the most in-human relations, those between alienated automatons; one speaks of happiness and means the perfect routinisation which has driven out the last doubt and all spontaneity."⁸⁹

The human consequences of such working conditions, just as they were in Fromm's time, are widespread and deep. Fromm presents a range of data to indicate what he calls 'the pathology of normalcy', including levels of suicide, 'alcoholism', homicide, and 'destructive

⁸⁵ James Daly, *BHA: Fact and Value: The Essentialist Answer to the Cartesian/Kantian Dichotomy of Is and Ought* [email list] (2000 [cited Friday 1st September, 15:08 2000]); available from <http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/bhaskar/2000m09/msg00001.htm>.

⁸⁶ See Coates, *Workers' Control*, Seymour Melman, *After Capitalism: From Managerialism to Workplace Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

⁸⁷ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 295.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 182, Melman, *After Capitalism*, Ch. 8.

acts', in western societies.⁹⁰ Generally there has been a marked intensification of the conditions Fromm cites. Although the link between work and mental illness is far from clear, the level of mental illness today itself is appalling. One in four people will be affected by depression at some point in their life,⁹¹ and almost three million people in the UK are diagnosed as having depression at any one time.⁹² The World Health Organisation estimates that by the year 2020, major depression will be second only to chronic heart disease as an international health burden; this is measured by its cause of death, disability, incapacity to work and the medical resources it uses.⁹³ A measure of how alienated the workplace is, of the pathology of normalcy, can be judged by the fact that there are thirty working days lost due to depression and anxiety for every single day lost in industrial disputes protesting about wages and conditions.⁹⁴ In contrast, there is also some interesting evidence that participatory democracy increases 'happiness' or a sense of well-being.⁹⁵ The concrete mechanisms Fromm proposed for both political and economic democracy, and for the reinvigoration of the society in which they might flourish, will now be examined. His wish was that the nascent and ill-formed political consciousness he detected should be given form, that existing feelings of powerlessness should be reversed, and that human flourishing become an ongoing product of political, social and working life.

⁹⁰ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 6-10.

⁹¹ WHO, "The World Health Report 2001: Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope," (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2001), 20.

⁹² Maurice M. Ohayon et al., "The Prevalence of Depressive Disorders in the UK," *Biol Psychiatry* 45, no. 3 (1999).

⁹³ Suicide is now the cause of 22 per cent of deaths of men aged 15 to 24. The suicide rate for men aged 25 to 44 has increased considerably since the mid-1970s reaching a peak of almost 25.6 per 100,000 population in 1998; in 2000 the rate for that age group was 23.4 per 100,000. Office of National Statistics, *Death Rates from Suicide: By Gender and Age, 1974-2000, Social Trends 32* (London: ONS, 2001).

⁹⁴ G Harnois and P Gabriel, "Mental Health and Work: Impact, Issues and Good Practices," (Geneva: World Health Organisation, International Labour Office, 2000).

⁹⁵ Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer, "Happiness, Economy and Institutions," *The Economic Journal* 110, no. October (2000).

Towards social and political sanity

Whilst both Fromm and Schumpeter had observed the entropy of political intelligence and activity, Fromm responded both with his own political activity, and with a number of suggestions to provide opportunity for a creative, productive democracy. To our ears some of his suggestions may have the air of naivety, but it must be realised that they were written at a time of burgeoning radical activity, when such ideas could find much more receptive ears. Additionally, some of the language used tends to obscure similarities to ideas and activities currently occurring. The surface texture of historically specific language cannot, however, obscure entirely the interesting similarities between G.D.H. Cole's analysis, also written at a time of much radical political activity, and Fromm's suggestions. In times of radical political activity essentialist affirming theories of social formation and political possibility are uniquely productive and resonant. In terms of Fromm's apparent naivety and obscurity it must also be noted that he was not a political theorist by training, and some of his prescriptions for democracy bear the mark of the talented amateur.

Fromm was writing in a society considerably more alienated than Cole. The extension of consumer culture, its political parallel in mass party politics, and the embedding of the marketing character in the contemporary psyche, were far more advanced by the time Fromm came to be writing. He finds he must make prescriptions for situations which can draw out humanist potentialities rather more attenuated by capitalist, marketing conditions than Cole faced. This sometimes manifests itself in the 'messianic' voice Maccoby refers to as problematic.⁹⁶ In the context of the psychoanalyst-analysand relationship it may well be that such an impression would be counter-productive. Although there is some currency in Maccoby's observation that Fromm's psychoanalytic technique, striving to liberate the patient to make better choices, could leave an analysand with

⁹⁶ Maccoby, "The Two Voices of Erich Fromm."

defensive reactions and a resistance to remembering the origins of infantile authority,⁹⁷ in normative political theory, although still a weakness, it can have a positive role. Some sense that the future could transcend the present, that "the future texture of life, work and even love might little resemble that now familiar to us", is valuable in political theory.⁹⁸ Fromm's analysis of social character can offer a telling and deep description of existing conditions and their developmental history. It will also begin to become clear how the emergence of the productive ideal can be given a 'history' through a deep knowledge of existing social and political circumstances, and knowledge of the essential contradiction of human nature which drives them.

Where representative democracy alienates people's thinking and activity in the political process, the focus of Fromm's prescriptions were to encourage arenas of meaningful action. Initially he sets out his vision in *The Sane Society*, fully a decade before the upsurge in interest in participatory democracy of the 1960s. Here he insists that meaningful decision-making cannot occur in the conditions of mass democracy. The process must be disaggregated to a more local, human, level, in face-to-face groups of approximately five hundred or so people, similar in tone to the early American town meetings of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁹ The information upon which these groups would found their discussion and decision would in part be provided by an independent non-political cultural agency, a diverse plurality of experts "whose outstanding achievements and moral integrity are beyond doubt".¹⁰⁰ In this brief outline, however, he does not say how they would be chosen, or by whom.

The objection can be raised that in harking back to early American town meetings as a model for this arrangement Fromm is being unrealistic. The demands of nation-building, and of pioneering in

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia, Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), xii.

⁹⁹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 340.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 342.

distant open country, away from metropolitan centres demanded high levels of co-operation which made such democratic forms workable. Some American towns still have the form of local democracy, especially in New England, particularly in Vermont.¹⁰¹ In a nation of 'lonely bowlers', where less than half eligible voters bother with Presidential elections, or in the UK, where local election turnouts can fall as low as 19%, this seems highly optimistic.¹⁰² Added to this Fromm's own analysis of contemporary social character as concerned largely with the need for money, status, and consumption the picture begins to look irrationally optimistic.

Two factors should, however, be brought to bear on our consideration of these criticisms. Firstly, when Fromm reassessed his ideas in *The Revolution of Hope* (1968) there was a resurgence of interest in, and activity around, the issue of increased participation, particularly workplace democracy. In this context Fromm was working with the material to hand, linking final ends with concrete intermediate goals. While these intermediate goals and concrete suggestions were always embedded in their particular circumstances, they also remained informed by his analysis of human nature and the relationship of social character to the individual. Wilde, however, remains pessimistic about the viability of face-to-face groups in practice, citing the recent passion for 'focus groups' of certain political parties. He observes that they are used by these parties to inform policy positions, in a way where "there is no presumption of an informed opinion, constructive debate, or power from below. The process of consultation blurs into a process of wider manipulation."¹⁰³ In this context a second consideration can, however, be added; that today a number of innovations in practice share many features that Fromm would recognise, to offer a more optimistic view of the viability of face-to-face groups. Particularly relevant here are

¹⁰¹ Frank M. Bryan and John McClaughry, *The Vermont Papers: Recreating Democracy on a Human Scale* (Chelsea, Vt.: Chelsea Green Publishing, 1989).

¹⁰² Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

¹⁰³ Wilde, *The Politics of Fromm*, unpublished, chapter 4

Fishkin's suggestions for deliberative polling, which Channel 4 put into practice.¹⁰⁴

Fishkin claims that such processes can have a lasting, empowering effect on individuals. This grand claim is, in part, borne out by O'Neill's research.¹⁰⁵ Here people taking part in Citizens' Juries stated that they not only found that the process had affected their attitude to wider involvement, but also their own personal ways of communicating and acting. O'Neill identifies a number of stages in the life-cycle of a citizens' jury, including a 'taking ownership' stage where the jury members assert their own authority and concerns over the 'experts' and bureaucrats they were faced with. This is good evidence for the imaginative and creative capability of 'ordinary' people, and also of an enduring commitment to take work seriously, where the workers themselves are taken seriously.

In *The Revolution of Hope* Fromm develops his ideas for politically transformative groups in more detail. He envisages three types of organisation to breathe new life into American political life and move it towards humanistic ideals. What is required is a mass movement to propagate the humanisation of society, a movement which is not aligned to any political party. Fromm is again very keen to emphasise that these groups (or 'Clubs' as they were now to be called) should be non-bureaucratic. By this he seems to mean that they should be based on direct unmediated experience, rather than the distant, unreflexive, non-transparent bureaucracy of state and corporate servants.¹⁰⁶ He visualizes these clubs as having a permanent base of some sort, where regular meetings would exchange information on, and discuss the issues of the day. They would also consider ways of disseminating the views of the group. There would be practical

¹⁰⁴ James S. Fishkin, *The Dialogue of Justice: Toward a Self-Reflective Society* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), James S. Fishkin, *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy*, New ed. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ Claire O'Neill, "Citizens' Juries and Social Learning: Understanding the Transformation of Preference" (Ph.D, University of Luton, 2003).

¹⁰⁶ Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanised Technology* (London: Harper and Row, 1968), 154.

activity, such as campaigning, wider engagement in discussion, public debates and local issue based community activity.¹⁰⁷ It is important to Fromm that these clubs have a style all their own, distinct from political parties and other cultural clubs. He argues that:

The discussion should be led in such a way that the issues are clarified rather than obscured by phraseology and ideology. There must be a significant number of people in each club who are aware of the pitfalls of language, are on the watch for obscuring or ideological language, and can teach how to think and to speak realistically.¹⁰⁸

Although he shows a keen awareness of the problems that such face-to-face groups encounter¹⁰⁹, there is a disturbing element of elitism in this formulation of the need for the discussions of 'ordinary' people to be led. There are undoubtedly problems associated with rhetoric, ideological posturing, ego assertion, and defensiveness to be found in such groups, but Fromm's advocacy could be construed as a patronising kind of leadership.

The concern which motivates him here undoubtedly comes from his professional experience as a practicing psychoanalyst in group therapy sessions. The tension associated with public speaking, the exposing and sharing of experiences and thoughts with strangers, often from different backgrounds, can be debilitating. In this context, his suggestions for the presence of people especially tuned to ideology or pretentious obscurantism have parallels with the practices of some community partnership groups who utilise facilitators in meetings. In these groups previously antagonistic associations of people - public sector, business, voluntary sector, and residents - attempt to come to a consensus or understanding. All the people involved came with wildly varying levels of experience and

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 154-6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰⁹ As identified by Anne Phillips, for instance; Anne Phillips, *Engendering Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), Chpt 5, Anne Phillips, "Must Feminists Give up on Liberal Democracy?," in *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*, ed. David Held (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 96-98.

confidence. Many of these projects provide training for residents in effective listening, public speaking and presentation skills.¹¹⁰ Some of the associations also have facilitators who help to keep the discussion moving productively in the direction the group themselves gathered to address.

Fromm's Clubs, the motor of his new humanistic movement, are not simply concerned with influencing political action, but would be there "to create a new attitude, to transform people, to demonstrate new ideas as they appeared."¹¹¹ These Clubs are intended as cultural, and social centres, which go beyond what a political club could aspire to; they are anticipated also to arouse a greater, or at least a different kind of, allegiance than political clubs. In addition the 'independent cultural agency' which Fromm outlined in *The Sane Society*, rather grandly called The National Council of the Voice of the American Conscience, a little more sensibly called a Supreme Cultural Council in *To Have or To Be?*, was to be an advisory body charged with clarifying issues and making clear all the real possibilities and alternatives available. He fully expected that although non-aligned, the weight of such respected opinion would act as a pressure on governments. This idea for a humanist think-tank, while again exhibiting a tendency to expert elitism (The Voice of the American Conscience?) in this particular form is over-ambitious and unrealistic. There have, however, been examples of expert bodies with humanistic motivations which have produced influential reports, such as the World Order Models Project.¹¹² At the micro-level, Fromm envisages smaller groups emerging, of perhaps twenty-five or so people, to live the unalienated life, in a more intense and committed way than the Clubs. They would combine a "realistic unsentimentality ... with deep faith and hope", in a life of

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey I Goatcher, "Can Recent Developments in Local Governance Deliver More Democracy to More People? A Case Study of Two Initiatives in Nottinghamshire" (Ba (Hons) Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, 1997).

¹¹¹ Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*, 157.

¹¹² Richard Falk, *On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

"meaningful consumption that serves the needs of life not the needs of producers."¹¹³ Many groups of this sort did indeed emerge at the time, and this form of resistance and creation continues to flourish.¹¹⁴

Although the mass movement that Fromm hoped for never materialised, eruptions of humanist resistance continue to occur. What is significant is the continued relevance of the strivings which Fromm identified and analysed. Strivings which, because they reflect the essential contradiction of human existence, must continue to struggle to find expression while alienated political and economic conditions prevail. Consideration of the economic arena does indeed form an important part of Fromm's project. As has been seen, Fromm considered work an extremely important area of human life. Just as he made suggestions to de-alienate and humanise political life, he also gave considerable attention to the world of work.

Towards de-alienated work

Can work be humanised? Will it not always remain a burdensome necessity? The intensive production methods which provide many of us with incredible, affordable plenty, must surely always retain an element of toil, most especially in ruthlessly competitive markets. The extension of decision-making downwards to a wide participatory base would surely undermine all productive work processes. Fromm clearly reveals the rigorous radicalism that so many critics discount, in insisting that hard choices must be made by society, and in providing guides to these decisions. Priorities in production and management methods would have to be reassessed in choosing between maximising production, profit, growth, and consumption with their corresponding costs to mental and physical well-being, or the maximal unfolding of human powers and potentiality.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

¹¹⁴ According to Lyman Towers Sargent, editor of *Utopian Studies*, there are more utopian groups in the United States now than at any time since the late 1960's.

¹¹⁵ Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology."

Whatever might be considered to humanise work, for Fromm the starting-point for such consideration had to be the structures within which work and material production operated. Although globalisation was yet to be coined as the everyday lens through which to view all human activity, Fromm was critically aware that although production took place within national boundaries, it was embedded in a competitive global market-place.¹¹⁶ Any democracy must develop strategies which take this into account, and so planning must conform to the strictures of competitive advantage. The criterion of social progress and human welfare would, however, appear to be totally incompatible with this. What is imperative is the criterion of human need, grounded in knowledge of human nature, to inform any strategy which might be considered. Fromm anticipated the impending efficiencies which computerisation promised, while also (in 1950) observing that the material basis "to visualise the day when the table will be set for all who want to eat" was already with us.¹¹⁷ What was needed then, and is more-so today, was a form of planning which could distribute the resources of production and material to realise rational, loving, and productive human beings and lives.

Whatever gets done in any society will always need to be planned. This might be done by private, fragmented and profit-motivated institutions and individuals, or by public bodies of some sort. These may be centralised and remote or more localised, although these might be equally 'remote' and bureaucratised. Fromm acknowledged the role of planning, but abhorred the stultified bureaucratic form it took, while also being aware of the equally damaging chaos and inhumanity of privatised planning. His response was to call for the reformulation of planning along humanistic lines.¹¹⁸ Active participation in political decision making, where possible by those directly affected by those decisions, is his solution. Again, citizen's

¹¹⁶ Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

¹¹⁷ Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1950), 1.

¹¹⁸ Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*, 97.

juries, standing panels, study circles, deliberative polls, etc are a way forward here.¹¹⁹

As was noted above, Fromm was deeply concerned with the chimerical nature of freedom in modern society. One aspect of its manifestation is in the un-freedom of wage labour. The liberal notion of contract is supposed to be an expression of freely entered into, mutual relationships.¹²⁰ In that most basic and essential of contracts, of employment in paid labour, the un-freedom for the vast majority could hardly be more stark. There is both a physiological necessity for the wage paid employment supplies, and a psychic human necessity for work.¹²¹ The conditions of employment must all too often be of secondary importance to the need for payment. Unless one is in the position to be able to reject the terms of a contract, one is not free.¹²² For this reason Fromm was greatly in favour of what he called a *universal subsistence guarantee*, but which is today referred to as *basic income*. This idea has a long pedigree. Tom Paine suggested a *universal dowry* to be paid to all adults. Bertrand Russell was in favour of a basic income, as were the Quakers and Guild Socialists of the time.¹²³ In America in the 1960's, as well as Fromm,

¹¹⁹ See John Stewart, *Developments in Local Democratic Practice* (Birmingham: Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, 1995)., for an overview of recent practical examples.

¹²⁰ See Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critical Analysis of Liberal Theory* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1979), Carole Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002), Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

¹²¹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 345.

¹²² See Pateman for extended discussions on this topic (Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*.), particularly on the marriage contract. (Carole Pateman, "Freedom and Democratization: Why Basic Income Is to Be Preferred to Basic Capital," in *The Ethics of Stakeholding*, ed. Keith Dowding, Jurgen De Wispelaere, and Stuart White (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).). G.D.H. Cole was also deeply sceptical about the possibility of freedom in a state of 'wagery'. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 34.

¹²³ van Trier, "Who Framed 'Social Dividend'?"

some on the right, such as Milton Friedman, were also in favour, although for very different reasons.¹²⁴

A guaranteed basic income (BI), paid by a government to adult citizens, which is paid unconditionally, not means tested or tied to accepting a job etc., and which is paid to individuals, not to families,¹²⁵ would deliver an increased level of control over one's life, and enable participation in cultural, social and political life. Basic Income would provide the security required for self-government, and the ability to refuse or remove oneself from relationships which are dangerous or demeaning without heroic effort.¹²⁶ As Pateman observes, it removes impediments to achieving a wider and deeper democracy, most especially for women.¹²⁷ In addition it represents a symbol of equal standing. Objections to BI take two forms: either it would destroy the incentive to work, or it would be far too costly to implement. To assume that people only work because they are paid to do it is premised on the notion that human beings are congenitally lazy. Fromm insists that there would be very few who would not work at all - the neurotically lazy and those who might choose a very frugal contemplative life.¹²⁸ In

¹²⁴ For a recent introduction to the BI debate see Tony Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security. An Introduction to the Basic Income Debate* (London: Macmillan, 1999). The 1990s saw a dramatic expansion in the BI debate, among academics and freethinking politicians. See also Marc Hunyadi and Marcus Maenz, "Does 'Real-Freedom-for-All' Really Justify Basic Income?," *Swiss Political Science Review* 4, no. 1 (1998), Philippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), Philippe Van Parijs, ed., *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform* (London: Verso, 1992)..

¹²⁵ Basic Income European Network <<http://www.econ.ucl.ac.be/etes/bien/bien.html>>, and Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 336.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Pateman employs very similar language in pressing for BI as a distinctly *democratic* right. Pateman, "Freedom and Democratization."

¹²⁷ Pateman, "Freedom and Democratization."

¹²⁸ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 336. Even Zygmunt Bauman has become persuaded of the necessity of BI, "Humans are creative beings, and it is demeaning to suppose that a price tag is what sets apart work from non-work, exertion from loafing; it mutilates human nature to suggest that without that price tag humans would prefer to remain idle and let their skills and imagination rot and rust." Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1998), 97.

contributing to a humanised democracy, a guaranteed financial income is necessary insists Fromm, but it is not sufficient in itself.¹²⁹ It would help to transform society, but in continuing to operate within a consumerised society, its beneficially effects may well dissipate in commercialised acquisitiveness and dissatisfaction. For this reason, when revisiting BI in the 1960s when it underwent a renaissance as a policy option, Fromm urged that basic goods, rather than just money, make up a portion of BI. These could possibly include bread, milk and vegetables, and transport, housing and education.¹³⁰ His intention was to de-commodify society and human relationships. Importantly BI would also transform the world of paid employment into something much closer to a world of creative work. Businesses would have to make their enterprises more congenial and involving in order to find and keep workers. The development of opportunities for participation in decision making would be one such measure.¹³¹

As to the objection that BI would be prohibitively costly, Fromm believed that it would be only marginally more costly than existing social security measures. This argument has recently found support in the work of Ackerman and Alstott. Their calculations refer to the feasibility of a less congenial form of Basic Income: *basic capital*.¹³² This would all be funded through a wealth tax and death duties. Together with changes in consumption patterns and the humanisation in democratic methods Fromm hoped for, BI would reduce the indirect costs of the damaging effects of capitalist, consumer society, of chronic poverty, crime, and mental/psychological debility.¹³³ If BI could encourage business to offer conditions of

¹²⁹ Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*, 127.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹³¹ See Adrian Little, *Post-Industrial Socialism: Towards a New Politics of Welfare* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹³² Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 4-5.

¹³³ For a recent discussion on the connection between the 'idleness' objection and crime, see Doris Schroeder, "Wickedness, Idleness and Basic Income," *Res Publica* 7, no. 1 (2001)..

participation to workers, then Fromm was convinced that efficiency would not suffer. As well as offering a more congenial and creative workplace these innovations would also actually improve productivity. Fromm cites in particular the example of *Communities of Work*, a radical communitarian movement which flourished in post-war Europe, particularly in France, but also in Belgium, Switzerland, and Holland.

In these communities, work, play, and education were integrated into the life of democratic communities. They built upon the socialism of the Owenists, Syndicalists, anarchists, and Guild Socialists. Fromm emphasises the social and human situation of the workers in these communities of work, their relatedness one to the other and to their work.¹³⁴ The ethical consequences of living and working in these communities were rather more important to him than an emphasis on the socialisation of the means of production through ownership. Control is much more pertinent to Fromm's humanism. He quotes at length G.D.H. Cole, where in part, he refers to "the Bureaucratic reformer", no doubt in Cole's case meaning the Webbs and the Fabian form of centralised state socialism that lays far too much stress on the material side of life, a society of "well-fed, well-housed, well-clothed machines, working for a greater machine."¹³⁵ The integration of work, educational, cultural, and recreational life, in the Community of Work at Boimondeau particularly animated Fromm.¹³⁶ The Community's monthly review, *Le Lien*, illustrates the breadth of interests and involvements: reports of the football team's performance, visits to art galleries, of musical performances, all appear alongside recipes, reports from lectures on Marxism, ecumenical services, discussion of conscientious objection, and passages from Sartre and Thomas Aquinas.

¹³⁴ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 283.

¹³⁵ G.D.H. Cole and William Mellor, *The Meaning of Industrial Freedom* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1918), 3. cited by in Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 284.

¹³⁶ The example is that of Boimondeau, a watch-case factory, which became one of the seventh largest in France. Fromm relies on *All Things Common* by Claire Huchet Bishop. Harper and Brothers, New York. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 306-19.

More significantly, however, achievement in the community was the basis of payment rather than mere instrumental productivity. "A first-class mechanic who can play the violin, who is jolly, and a good mixer, etc, has more value to the community than another mechanic, equally capable professionally, but who is a sour-puss... etc".¹³⁷ Quite how these judgements were made, or how the congenitally morose or insular fared, is not mentioned. The principle of decoupling living and recompense from instrumental productivity, however, and the resulting valuing of a life fully-lived, illustrates a link with the benefits of BI, and the values of socialist humanism, which it could foster. Of great significance to Fromm was the devising of an ethical code by the members of these communities. It became clear to the *Companions* in the Communities of Work that as a basis for open discussion of the issues of the community, that a common starting point was needed, to indicate the direction in which they could all begin building together.¹³⁸ There was a wide diversity of inherited ethical backgrounds amongst the Companions and through individual and communal exploration of their inheritance, experience, and thought they found such a starting point. These were people, in Fromm's eyes, who had said yes to life with a 'maximum of consciousness'.¹³⁹ They worked together and their work had some of the quality of play.

A progressive role for trade union activity was also recognised by Fromm. He cites, for instance, Tannenbaum's proposal that trade unions could, incrementally, purchase enough shares in a company to give the workers real control over an enterprise, that they might "work for a meaningful aim in a meaningful way" rather than remain

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 310. p 14

¹³⁸ Melman makes the observation that agreements between workers, about how they relate to one-another, who is part of the worker group, about work time, job organisation, and work performance, are the beginnings of workplace democracy. This process (which Melman calls 'disalienation') "gives rise to solidarity and to mutual trust among workers instead of predatory competition; to democratic decision-making in place of managerial hierarchy; to judgements based on equality and fairness in place of arbitrary justice." Melman, *After Capitalism*, 272.

¹³⁹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 313.

commodities within an insensible structure.¹⁴⁰ Again, however, he points out that without a wider reformation, and a wider vision, nothing substantial would change. Individually reformed enterprises would still have to compete on the same terms in the same global market. Trade unions could here play a part, as actors on wider stages, because as Fromm insists "there is only one truly social orientation, namely the one of solidarity with mankind."¹⁴¹ Recent trade union activity gives, if not cause for unlimited optimism, at least some confirmation of Fromm's faith. Both in America and in Britain trade unions and community groups are forming alliances around labour issues to protect public services and improve the conditions of public workers.¹⁴² In doing so they are taking tentative steps towards breaking out of the narrow world of paid employment and intra-union competition for membership and differentials. The 'New Vision' movement in America, of the AFL-CIO, has also enjoyed a great deal of success, and trade unions were deeply involved in the anti-WTO/World Bank protests in Seattle, for instance.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 325. Fromm cites F. Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labour* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952). Something similar emerged later in the Swedish Wage Earner Funds, see Lawrence Wilde, "Swedish Social Democracy and the World Market," in *Transcending the State-Global Divide*, ed. Ronen Palan and Barry Gills (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994).

¹⁴¹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

¹⁴² Deborah Littman and Jane Wills, "Community of Interests," *Red Pepper*, February 2002. See also American Federation of Labour, Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) website <http://www.aflcio.org> and Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now (ACORN) <http://www.acorn.org>. In the UK TELCO (The East London Community Organisation) are drawing together the TUC and individual trade unions with local Mosques, Churches, Community Groups, school communities and other associations committed to working together on the common good. <http://www.telcocitizens.org.uk>. See also Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁴³ Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clare, *Five Days That Shook the World: The Battle for Seattle and Beyond* (London: Verso, 2000), Wainwright, *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy*.

Concluding comments

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, many of Fromm's prescriptions may sound rather naive. The underlying theory which gave rise to them, however, constitutes the enduring importance of his work. Fromm expresses a deep faith in human potential, while also preserving a 'realistic unsentimentality' deeply tinged, but not descending into, cynicism.¹⁴⁴ This humane unsentimentality comes to terms with the contradictions of human existence unflinchingly. We are capable of great self-destructive, and socially destructive acts, but also of unconditional love and creativity. We are both of nature, but not entirely slave to our instincts. This contradiction gives rise to various needs and desires; to counter separateness in relatedness; to transcend passive creature-ness; to gain some form of human rootedness; and to make intellectual sense of the world. Fromm's theory provides the means for understanding how the development of the individual and social-economic structure are linked, through the process of the formation of social character.

It is Fromm's contention that contemporary 'super-capitalism' has produced a distinct form of social character, the marketing character, which has narrowed the realm of positive attributes to those which could be promoted and sold. He remained, however, optimistic that the historically enduring productive ideal, a form which, because it is the balanced realisation of the contradiction between our instinctual and our intellectual capacities, would refuse to disappear entirely, and would continue to provide our greatest hope for a fully human life. It is this potential which all Fromm's concrete political prescriptions were designed to realise. In his suggestions for humanising work and democratising the workplace he sought to liberate creative passions which are alienated by narrow instrumental agendas. The mass movement for the transformation of political and social life which he hoped for, although it never came about, has some striking similarities to the new social movements which later emerged. This non-hierarchical, non-bureaucratic

¹⁴⁴ Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*, 158.

political form continues to reappear intermittently in both political and cultural life.

Fromm was not primarily a political theorist, and as such he does not analyse the political process through which power is exercised and challenged. Critical realist theory offers a way of filling this lacuna, with the concept of stratified ontology, particularly through Archer's concepts of cultural and social emergent properties. These provide a theoretical analysis which enables us to see that there are emergent properties, both of the power structures opposing participatory democracy, and importantly, in the human subject. We thus gain the conceptual tools to analyse the interaction of both these phenomena against the end of human flourishing. The conceptual depth of a critical realist analysis, which distinguishes dialectically interactive levels of existence, provides a means of following the interaction of power, resistance, and the forces driving them. Fromm's work shares much of the depth of critical realism, but his particular contribution is a thoroughly substantial account of the motivating contradiction of human striving, and a view of the end of human flourishing.

In *The End of Utopia* Jacoby mourns the passing of "the idea that history contains the possibilities of freedom and pleasure hardly tapped."¹⁴⁵ This is precisely the history that Maccoby says is missing from Fromm's ideal type. It is a history which, although it remains unwritten, Fromm shows us lays waiting to be discovered, understood, and built upon. Although Maccoby's accusations against Fromm of messianism are not entirely without foundation, in matters of normative political theory such a utopian insistence is valuable. This affective and inspirational presence, when combined with his account of human nature and the goal of a fully realised life thoroughly dispenses with Maccoby's doubts as to Fromm's theoretical success and contemporary relevance to participatory democracy theory.

¹⁴⁵ Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, xii.

Chapter 5 - Benjamin Barber

Until recently Benjamin Barber was the Director of the 'Walt Whitman Centre' (WWC), which he founded in 1989. The full name of the WWC, for the Culture and Politics of Democracy, alludes to Barber's enduring interest not only in democracy, but the arts and the community within which they are situated. The WWC examines American democracy in the spirit of Walt Whitman's ideal of a vigorous citizenry engaged in the culture and politics of a vital society - democracy understood as a mode of living within political institutions. As well as this work at the WWC, Barber is a, not fully, 'paid-up member' of Amitai Etzioni's communitarian movement. He contributed to Etzioni's communitarian reader¹ and is on the editorial board of *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities*, the communitarian journal. He also endorsed *The Responsive Communitarian Platform*, albeit with a reservation on their moral education section.² I examine this reservation below, in a discussion of Barber's ethics.

Barber is profoundly sceptical of any deep linkage between philosophy, political theory, and political activity proper. He is particularly concerned at any attempt to ground politics in *a priori* ideas or goals. Barber regards philosophers *per se*, for instance, as 'tyrannical' and 'absolutist' in their insistence on fixed rational grounds.³ Politics and morality must both admit of exceptions and demand modifications, they cannot be absolutes, universal or

¹ Benjamin R. Barber, "A Mandate for Liberty: Requiring Education-Based Community Service," in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

² Amitai Etzioni, ed., *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), xxv-xxxix.

³ Barber employs Dewey and Nietzsche's words here. Benjamin R. Barber, *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 10.

foundational.⁴ Politics is resolutely and unavoidably something we *do* in conditions of constraint and necessity, buffeted by the wind, waves, and tides of given historical conditions.⁵ Community offers the safe haven in which politics can be 'done'.

The communitarian idea of democracy, elements of which are shared by all three of the pragmatic sceptical theorists of participatory democracy examined here, posits community as an arena where values are maintained and where politics takes precedence over philosophy.⁶ 'Community' can, however, suggest either a universalistic sense of all of humanity, where each and all can question and criticise, or a particularistic sense, where participation is constricted. This latter is perhaps the form best suited to generate the existential benefits of community as a bulwark against the atomism of liberal individualism, which Barber values.

My examination of Barber's writing on participatory democracy in this chapter, begins by investigating his view of the role of imagination and art, which are consonant with philosophy, and which Barber appears to regard as similar forms of inactive, mental pastime. Initially I will examine Barber's attitude towards the concept of representation, which links art and politics in his work. Those concepts are analysed under four headings, explaining his idea of the role of art in community: the value of moral security over imagination; of moral revivification over entertainment, and the relationship between the audience-actor relationship and its parallel in representative democracy.

Barber displays a great deal of anxiety over representation and the corrosive consequences to a community of imagination. In describing and defending his philosophy of pragmatic scepticism towards essences, he puts great currency in the moral security of community. As such, the role of entertainment is found greatly wanting against

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶ Stephen Eric Bronner, *Ideas in Action, Political Tradition in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

the role of moral revivification, which communitarian democratic politics affords. Next I analyse what Barber sees as the positive benefits of participatory democracy. This task is somewhat complicated by Barber's vigorous rhetorical style. The positive role of an ethic of political judgment and of the benefits of a pragmatic scepticism must be gleaned from his spirited denunciations of liberal politics and philosophy. From this investigation of his ethical basis for participatory democracy I turn to the nature of the citizen of his 'strong' democratic community. Barber assembles all these 'philosophical' and ethical elements into a programme of institutional initiatives. The ability of these to embody and deliver the strong democratic talk, the processes of decision resulting from that talk, and the ways in which they can be actioned, will then be outlined and analysed, before some concluding comments are offered on the nature of human being which emerges from Barber's participatory democracy theory.

I argue that Barber's anxiety towards human imagination underpins his systematic and thorough critique of liberalism, and thence his prescriptions for participatory democracy. The role of representation, although not entirely removed from Barber's vision of democracy, is found to be severely flawed and incomplete as the sole basis of a workable and sufficient democracy. More fundamentally, Barber identifies the various founding, universal ideas which liberalism peddles as corrosive to a fully democratic society. He insists that these must be abandoned, and he is most exercised by claims to any enduring conception of human nature. They have no place, he insists, in democratic theory. Through an examination of both his critique of liberal democracy and his own alternative, however, we will find embedded in his own theory a number of preconceptions of the human subject and the nature of the social world. These embedded elements are drawn variously from those theorists who have exerted a particular influence over Barber's work; Rousseau, Burke, and Oakeshott. Moreover, because of the particular nature of his 'groundless' theory, the resulting participatory democracy is unable to adequately account for the benefits he wishes

to flow from it, namely, more fully realised and emancipated individuals, and deeply satisfying and supportive communities.

Representation

The artistic community

I argue in this chapter that Barber's caution towards imagination leaves his philosophical justification for participatory democracy rather too conservative to promote or deliver the strong and responsive democracy he seeks. Without the introduction of novelty which the engagement of human imagination with existing circumstances would offer, his participatory democracy tends rather to a reproduction of existing conditions, albeit under a novel sheen of surface appearance. Barber's concern with art and the polity continues to find expression throughout his career, significantly in his pursuit of concrete activity at the Whitman Centre through the '*Art Matters Too!*' programme. In this "the relationship between art and democratic society [is explored] by examining the artist as a citizen: the artist's responsibilities to society and society's responsibility to the artist, (i.e. questions of funding, censorship, and tax policy)."⁷ Although Barber acknowledges the importance of artists to the rich and flourishing life of a community, they are here treated as receptacles of moral duty towards citizenship, rather than in relation to the role of art as a creative, transformational practice. The artistic community is one of experts with a duty towards the less or differently gifted fellow citizens. Barber's community acknowledges the unavoidable hierarchy of talents, specialisms or gifts, but these are explicitly *non-political* areas in his world. Difference in skill or gift adds to the richness and diversity of a polity, but cannot and must not interfere with politics. Differences are valuable specialisms where there is prior agreement, but politics is concerned with "the small residual areas where philosopher and scientist fail to achieve a

⁷ Anon., *Art Matters Too!* [Internet Web site] ([cited 5 June 2002]); available from <http://wvc.rutgers.edu/art.htm>.

consensus.”⁸ It is this fragmentary and disorderly aspect to difference, at least partly a result of the free rein of imagination, which perturbs Barber, and mirrors his perturbation with liberal philosophy and politics. In order to understand Barber’s disquiet towards liberal philosophy and eventually liberal representative democracy, first I shall examine his work on the connection between the form and content of theatre and the content of democratic politics, before moving on to examine in detail Barber’s critique of imaginative re-presentation in the theatre.

Two years before *Strong Democracy* Barber, together with Michael McGrath, edited a volume to which he contributed an essay examining Rousseau’s views on the potential contribution of theatre to the virtuous polity.⁹ Rousseau is an influence which Barber consistently draws upon.¹⁰ The essay in question can reasonably be taken as a touchstone for Barber’s position, notably on the role of art, but also as already claimed, on the utility to politics of imagination. More precisely it states the proper function that theory or philosophy should have in a democracy.

In kind with Dewey, Barber sees politics, and especially democracy, as primarily a realm of action, thus he is committed to an active participatory democracy rather than a total reliance on passive representative democracy. In an indicative and revealing passage, Barber displays the basis of his anxiety towards both imagination and the passive aspects of representative democracy, through Rousseau’s parallel discussion of intensive cosmopolitan living and the theatre. For Rousseau Barber suggests, city living - especially in capital cities - corrupts the virtuous polity through “its playfulness, which inspires frivolity, weak spiritedness, and finally moral collapse; its leisure, which leads to idleness, ennui, and an

⁸ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 16.

⁹ Benjamin R Barber, “Rousseau and Brecht: Political Virtue and the Tragic Imagination,” in *The Artist and Political Vision*, ed. Benjamin R Barber and Michael J. Gargas McGrath (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Books, 1982).

¹⁰ Another recurrent, and significant influence is Edmund Burke, which will be examined below.

insatiable desire for passive, vicarious living (entertainment)."¹¹ This passage shares a similar diagnosis to that of Guy DeBord's *Society of the Spectacle*.¹² But where DeBord's theory leaves him, and us, trapped in a downward spiral of dehumanising totality, Barber endeavours to find a more optimistic prognosis, with as we shall see, rather mixed results.

Theatre, for Barber can also stand to represent the cosmopolitan polity or political community. In the polity as in the theatre "drama rests precisely on conventionalised play, organised leisure, and the vicarious titillations of the comparative imagination; it panders to opinion and corrodes autonomy."¹³ Barber thus appears to value the preservation of autonomy as a good. He is also deeply concerned at the corruption of community. Theatre, and its imaginative representation of life, is both the symptom of a corrupt *form of life*, and also one of the causes of that corruption.

He sums up Rousseau's objections to theatre as corrosive of virtue, and as a provoker of both the benign and the malignant passions. Theatre silences reason by sapping the human power for change by encouraging unnatural and unfulfillable desires.¹⁴ It privatises conscience and thought - as public truth becomes private opinion - and it replaces true feeling and public obligation with vicarious emotion, sentimentality, and passivity.¹⁵ Representation, both artistic and political we may conclude from the nature of Barber's language alone, fosters a silent conspiracy of self-deception between audience, actor, and author. Indeed he suggests that "their common illusion allows them to live out sterile fantasies without substance, to feel passions without consequence, to take risks with nothing at stake, to enjoy emotion without suffering, and to revel in sentiment

¹¹ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht." p.5

¹² Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

¹³ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

without commitment or obligation."¹⁶ Between them, audience, actor, and author construct a counterfeit existence which relieves them of any public responsibility for the biases of their opinion. An audience and a represented citizenry share similar impairments of autonomy and activity.¹⁷

Barber is drawing our attention to an absent, genuine life, obscured or emptied-out by the essentialist insistences of philosophers, or playwrights and actors. He thus gives us an indication of his view of authentic human being as freedom in unmediated active political communities. "How free can the spectator be who permits his being - his experience - to be re-presented on stage, who allows real feelings to be simulated, real obligations to be vicariously discharged, real tears to be falsely shed...?" asks Barber.¹⁸ Whilst stressing the role of our imaginative nature in our civic corruption, Barber offers an indication towards his reconstructive goal.

Imagination or moral security

Citing Rousseau again, he observes that when constructing political institutions, we must be prepared to also necessarily change human nature, to transform each individual from a solitary self-contained entity into a part of a greater one from the physically independent existence in nature, to a partial and moral existence in society.¹⁹ Barber interprets this as calling for the replacing of imagination with disinterest.²⁰ The only way an individual - complete but solitary - can enjoy the moral security of society is to abandon imagination.²¹ She

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ As Rousseau famously has it, "The moment a people allows itself to be represented it is no longer free." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise*, trans. J. H. McDowell (College Station, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968).

¹⁸ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 9.

¹⁹ Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise*, 32.

²⁰ "Thus does the Lawgiver transform weakness into strength, dependency into moral autonomy and imagination into disinterest." Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 16.

²¹ "The individual is foolish, the multitude wise." Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 210. see also Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 80-81, 91.

must accept a partial life to become a self-governing lawgiver and embrace the moral community, to become part of a greater whole. While disparaging the falsifying, alienating, surface shimmer of representation as a foundation for decisive, engaged problem-solving activity, in theatre and in democracy, Barber seems to hold that a dispassionate, partial moral existence is the only desirable civic posture. Imagination isolates us and tempts us into a consoling world where agreement and certainty exist.²² Barber's democracy demands that regret be a constant presence, "a tribute we must pay to our incompleteness."²³ This may be the basis of the particularistic form of communitarian community; but a description of human political activity, whether partial or universal in nature, need not be denuded of human creativity and imagination, neither of affective passions.²⁴

Entertainment or moral revivification

Theatre is, first and foremost, entertainment. In Barber's analysis, as we shall see, this necessarily strips it of any pedagogic or didactic, revolutionary political potential it might communicate. This is also the case with contemporary political parties seeking election to any 'representational' public office.²⁵ It must play to, rather than challenge, public prejudice.²⁶ For theatre to be morally reconstructive it must be "rationally suasive even disturbing and discomfiting"²⁷, each of which would undermine amusement and entertainment. In developing the paradox between didactic art and entertainment, Barber draws, in addition to Rousseau, on the theatre

²² Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 80-81.

²³ *Ibid.*, 259, 307-08.

²⁴ see Beate Allert, *Languages of Visuality: Crossings between Science, Art, Politics, and Literature*, Kritik (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson, "Toward a Democracy of the Emotions," *Constellations* 9, no. 1 (2002).

²⁵ Brendan Bruce, *Images of Power: How the Image Makers Shape Our Leaders* (London: Kogan Page, 1992), Philippe J. Maarek, *Political Marketing and Communication* (London: John Libbey, 1995), A. Mughan, *Media and the Presidentialization of Parliamentary Elections* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

²⁶ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

writings of Brecht, who was equally troubled by this paradox of theatre: "How can it be divorced from spiritual dope traffic and turned from a home of illusions to a home of experience?", asked Brecht, who struggled to bring audiences to consider the unresolved contradictions in drama and political life.²⁸ He abandoned the passivity of traditional "empathy theatre" and created theatre designed to invoke the audiences' critical reflection. Contrary to Aristotelian theatre, which was devoid of political effect, Brecht created a process of theatrical questioning in order to make audiences more aware of the social contradictions that were commonly ignored in everyday life. Unlike "empathy theatre" where audiences were protected from the political effects haunting their everyday life, Brecht's primary goal was to bring his audience face-to-face with these effects.²⁹ Barber concludes that the problem is insurmountable. This is not merely due to particular reactionary cultures, or of any prevailing dramatic tradition, but of the very substance of theatre and the dramatic itself.³⁰ The questioning that theatre, and art generally, bring about need not, however, be of the harsh cynical kind. 'Rationally suasive' and entertainment need not be mutually exclusive, especially when linked with imagination and the gentle questioning enjoyment of communication.³¹

The Actor-Audience, Elector-Elected Relationship

Particularly relevant to political and democratic theory is the role of the relationship between actor and audience in dramatic representation, as it can clearly be compared to the relationship between political candidate and electorate. This is particularly the case in general or presidential elections. In analysing this theatrical relationship Barber again reveals a leaning towards 'an authentic'

²⁸ John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), 135.

²⁹ Juliet Koss, "Playing Politics with Estranged and Empathetic Audiences: Bertolt Brecht and Georg Fuchs," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96 (1997).

³⁰ He makes a similar point about philosophers and philosophy.

³¹ See the work of Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1958).

and 'a real' of relationships and of persons. Two different approaches to enacting a role present themselves to an actor; the actor on the stage - the dramatic, comedic, parliamentary, diplomatic or world stage - can either *assume* the role, take it upon themselves and play from the heart, or they can craft their role with detachment, playing the role from the head, merely rendering the exterior signs of emotion.³² In this latter form the actor is a calculating forger while the audience experiences genuine emotion. Thus there is a deep-seated inequality between actor and audience. Actors must become spectators to their own art and remove themselves from their own humanity "the better to execute their dramatic objectives."³³ For Barber this raises the question of authenticity particularly for the actor, who counterfeits "himself in defiance of his own nature".³⁴ At the same time, the authenticity of emotion and of experience the audience enjoys is corrupted:

In fact Rousseau's paradoxical involvement in and critique of the theatre are a profound comment on modernity itself, on the inability of modern man, liberated finally from the chains of their history, to remake themselves either through politics or art. The contest between theatre and politics today is thus stalemate, virtue gone its own way, oblivious alike to art and justice - and dramatists and lawgivers, living out the bleakest parts of Rousseau's prophecy, equally unable to arrest the ongoing decline.³⁵

For Barber, then, modernity is the problem, wresting us from both history and our 'own nature'. High on the list of culprits responsible

³² Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 19.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* Barber quotes Rousseau. Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise*, 79.

³⁵ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 25.

for this rationalising of the soul are the universalising philosophers of liberalism.³⁶

While modernity has liberated us from superstition and unaccountable irrational powers, Barber argues that it has also made us homeless and rudderless.³⁷ We criticise and question the very lives we must lead. We fool ourselves equally in hoping that didactic theatre might provide a solution, as it, on its own terms must denude itself of its moral force through its need to be entertaining. There is also the inherent falsity and irrationalism of acting, both for actor and audience, of re-presentation. Barber suggests that the denizens of modernity must either be complete and solitary with their imagination intact, to torture them with its unrealisable possibilities, or morally secure but partial and disinterested, within society. Within the infinite world of imagination or within the comforting boundaries of the actual.

Searching for positives in negatives

Why does Barber want participatory democracy?, what is it for?, and who is this public that is to think and talk? What can democracy deliver, that rule or advice by experts do not? Barber mourns the imposition of normative categories on the inexactness of politics by theorists and philosophers, intellectuals and experts. What, however, is it that they do that he is opposed to, what does their thinking and imagination prevent or pervert? In very broad terms Barber's participatory democracy seeks to challenge privatism and alienation, and give birth to a constituency of the public.³⁸

We must search for a deeper understanding than this, of what Barber believes democracy could and should provide largely in the negative assessment of liberal democracy that he offers. He

³⁶ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 179-82, Benjamin R. Barber, *A Passion for Democracy, American Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 271, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 100.

³⁷ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 179.

³⁸ Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*, 10, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 133.

identifies the theoretical framework of liberal philosophy which grounds it, and from which its conception of politics and democracy flow through a number of effects. The axiological frame, around which liberalism hangs and through which these unavoidable inertial forces issue, is materialism.³⁹ Liberal human beings are material beings in all they are and do, and around this axis there spin the corollaries of atomism, indivisibility, commensurability, mutual exclusivity, and psychological sensationalism.

Barber includes himself with Walzer and Rorty in opposing foundationalism⁴⁰ for which they are all accused of being vulnerable to relativism, subjectivism, and particularism. These are qualities liberal philosophers abhor, he responds, because they threaten to undermine cherished liberal values with the arbitrariness of politics itself.⁴¹ Liberals seek to reserve these values by cementing them into philosophical foundations. Barber objects, however, that in effect they only succeed in dissolving politics itself with their philosophising.⁴² Political philosophy, particularly the universalising liberal kind, forces politics into its own mould, into a deceptive general coherence, of what Unger calls a "false necessity ... of narrowly defined options"⁴³, by imitating philosophical exactitude.⁴⁴ Barber agrees with Burke that politics cannot be incorporated along "the ideal lines of mathematics: they are ... broad and deep as well as long and they admit of exceptions and demand modifications."⁴⁵ Politics is about the conflicts and commonalities of intersecting lives. Liberals and Conservatives⁴⁶ both "concur in opposing the right of the public to try to discover and legislate a common weal", by

³⁹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 32.

⁴⁰ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*.

⁴¹ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 7.

⁴² Rawls and Nozick are particularly attacked.

⁴³ Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*, 2nd. ed. (London: Verso, 2001), 6.

⁴⁴ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁶ Burke and Oakeshott excepted

emphasising different *a priori* values.⁴⁷ We will leave aside for the moment this rather monochrome, and one-dimensional caricature of philosophy, to try and tease out Barber's own preconceptions.

Despite the modest equivocation above - that the public 'try' to discern and perhaps realise 'a common weal' - we must observe that Barber does accept a common, human ability to 'discover and legislate'. There is evidently an indwelling ability to perceive the good and its absence, to posit its location and search for it, and then to secure those conditions in rationally constructed legislation. The rationality of modernity is not wholly negative. The negative and positive elements exist in a dialectical tension.⁴⁸ Thus the law-giver he identifies in "The Tragic Imagination" quote,⁴⁹ is actually everybody in the service of the common weal. There is nonetheless a harsh weight to the word 'legislate' which either reveals a mistrust of the better qualities of human beings or a personal authoritarian bent to Barber.⁵⁰ To return for the moment to 'politics' however, we see that political action is embedded in a network of prior causes and effects at work in the world under conditions of uncertainty, not of prior concepts of truth or justice.⁵¹ Thus, because philosophy, law and the morality of expert readers is demanded, the primary targets of all foundationalisms are in fact politics and democracy themselves. Barber is here engaging in a very similar stance to the conservative ideology of attacking experts and intellectuals.⁵² Barber in fact claims that politics finds its true vocation *after* philosophising and the judgement's of scientific experts fail.⁵³ For Barber we must

⁴⁷ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁹ See n35. p188 'Rousseau & Brecht', 25

⁵⁰ As it will be observed below, the whiff of the patriarch or schoolmaster hangs about much of Barber's work.

⁵¹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 122-23.

⁵² Edmund Burke and J.C.D. Clark, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 152-53, 83, Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooker to Oakshott*, *The T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures*; 1976 (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 11-16.

⁵³ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 210.

bend our philosophy to existing conditions, rather than abandon our civic convictions if they violate philosophical principles. We should not complain, as Nozick does, of the perplexing incompatibility of our principles with experienced citizenship.⁵⁴ Philosophy, claims Barber can be married to politics only by subjugating politics to its will.⁵⁵ Politics is therefore public doing, not private reasoning towards an individual version of the good.⁵⁶ Questions of meaning must be publicly constructed, in deliberation and decision. Thus the meaning of the good, or the true, is contingently open to temporal and cultural particularity.⁵⁷ So, where Kant treats autonomy, action, and sovereignty in terms of *immutable* universal categories, in effect viewing people as they ought to be, rationally capable of individual good will, Barber seeks to view people "as they are (self-interested, though capable of common will under the right political arrangements)".⁵⁸ We must observe at this point, however, that although the content of the common will itself may change, Common Will as a goal and the duty to pursue it does not.

Again, embedded in Barber's avowedly ungrounded theory, there lie presumed, pre-existing, and enduring elements of human nature. If we are capable of discovering or creating 'common good will' there must also be both a capacity and a need for solidarity, a recognition of shared goals or goods and the capacity to work together to achieve them. 'Appropriate political arrangements' are nothing more than the institutional realisation of those goods. They are distinctly human creations, and the result of 'doing' directed, of purposive actions. They are not accidental occurrences. Therefore it is the case that Barber's doing is directed by something. So whilst he recognises the dynamic of day-to-day political activity and the imperfect, inherited conditions of the past, his emphasis on contingency pushes against

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8. see the preface to *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

⁵⁵ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 9, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 100.

⁵⁶ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 13, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 122-23.

⁵⁷ Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*, 25-26.

⁵⁸ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 14.

the unspoken ethic of that activity and precludes the utility, or even sense, of attempting to act purposively: we can only react. He dismissively characterises any such purpose, or imperative as the 'private truths' of disputative philosophers. Public opinion must always trump such private 'truth', because in politics the concept of truth, as cognitive certainty, is far too often absent.

In contrast to Dewey, who sees the scientific community as a paradigm of democracy engaged in the search for valuable/working knowledge in shared pursuance, Barber sees science, and philosophy, as far too much like private disputation that will always crumble back into opinion. And yet, philosophical traditions do persist, albeit with individual nuances, touches of originality, diversity and creativity. Surely the progress, or at least change, of philosophy is a telling example of 'politics' itself, as the pursuit of a common good in suitable arrangements of activity? It is precisely the act of positing a possible certainty that Barber objects to, not the activity of search. But this is odd, because the search for, and/or construction of, 'what we have in common'⁵⁹ is a form of certainty at least as secure as the clustering of thought around a particular philosophical tradition. Philosophical traditions need not be closed systems. Indeed, in practice they seldom are, as they are always being questioned and chased or goaded into new areas. Some, like critical realism, are avowedly open, as we shall see later.

The imagination displayed, however, in directing thought towards an end-point, radically questioning existing conditions with dynamic acts of thoughtful inspiration, a process implicit in scientific practice, whether of a Khunian or Popperian model, is what seems to disturb Barber. Where science is an appropriate paradigm to Dewey, for Barber, along with philosophy and theatre, it remains inadequate because it is too specific and specialised. The life of the citizen is general. Philosophy is inadequate because it is removed from living;

⁵⁹ "using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion." Barber cites the passage in Oakeshott (Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*.) from which this comes, a number of times, vis. Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 156, 75.

and theatre fails because it is inherently contradictory and centred on 'make-believe', falsehood and dissembling. There is nothing left but action itself. Political activity is, however, shared common civic activity.⁶⁰ The 'truth' of that activity is revealed in its workability, its delivery power, in whatever are the admissible standards of current fashion.⁶¹ Philosophy is like a cancer in politics, infesting it by trying to make politics like itself. The philosophical preoccupation with reason overwhelms the affective and passionate character of politics.⁶² Politics, and particularly strong participatory democracy, in Barber's formulation, is public thinking; and what is most important is what we mean by public, not thinking.⁶³

In Barber's view we are forced to be adrift on a boundless ocean by the 'nature' of the human universe as chronically, inherently uncertain. The physical and chemical laws of nature have to be accepted as valid simply as they are. The validity of human laws, however, do not stem from their mere existence, they are subject to the assessment of action and circumstance.⁶⁴ We can, however, be salvaged from the 'boundless ocean' by the process of political judgement in the communities in which we live. We cannot be free as individuals, as we would then be subject to the buffeting of the 'naturally' boundless sea of an ungrounded universe. As atomised, possessive individuals we would have no history or tradition. We would be like the brutes of nature, in Berry's colourful simile "bereft ... of thought and freedom brutes [non-human/non-reasoning life] are

⁶⁰ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 199.

⁶¹ Another essay in the same volume, (Benjamin R. Barber, "Political Judgement: Philosophy as Practice," in *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 193-211.) is also full of negative views of 'cold reason', rationalism, the excising of passion from judgement, and the private act of reasoning. This appears to leave us with their opposites; public, emotional, situated, impassioned, and shared views and values.

⁶² Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*.

⁶³ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 200.

⁶⁴ Christopher J. Berry, *Human Nature, Issues in Political Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 16.

confined to the repetitiveness of Nature - [where] one generation of pigs is like all other generations of pigs."⁶⁵

Barber's account of the lot of a human life bears some similarity to Hobbes in this regard. To Hobbes we are animals of desire and will, with a natural need for perpetual motion. Our will is merely "the final appetite of deliberation", and to be alive is to be in motion, moving, deliberating constantly between appetite and aversion.⁶⁶ Reason to Hobbes is simply a calculation, adding and subtracting between appetite and aversion; it is not a cause of action. Reason is subordinate to the demands of appetite and aversion, to the boundless sea of contingency. Action in itself, our "endeavour" - as natural as "the motion of limbs" - is all. Politics is necessarily of such a texture that our best laid plans 'gang aft angly', we can predict that human nature will *not conform* predictably to a pre-designed outcome. That design is itself a human product, which means that human nature is an 'obstacle' to itself. It is the very nature of this self contradiction which means this obstacle can never be fully overcome.⁶⁷ Barber sees man as naturally imperfectible and naturally appetitive. Although he talks of the general will, this will always be a contingent communal will.

Ethics

In addressing the ethical conundrum of politics, 'what shall we do?', Barber argues that participatory democracy is uniquely placed to produce political judgement, as it "maximises interaction and thus guarantees the diversity and generality that is crucial to prudent judgment."⁶⁸ Participatory democracy is to be preferred, as it can call upon and mobilise the greatest diversity and generality of citizen input. Barber takes a thoroughly epistemological approach, in creating from this mobilised diversity, a fertile ground for political

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 [1651]), 29

⁶⁷ Berry, *Human Nature*, 25.

⁶⁸ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 200.

judgement.⁶⁹ There is certainly no good-life to aim our personal decisions at; as individuals we cannot *know* what to do, because "political judgement is defined by activity in common rather than thinking alone."⁷⁰ Political judgement is a practical skill, developed in the doing of politics. Theoretically sound bases or virtues do not precede and produce good politics as such. Because political judgement is produced by our practical activity, the object, the moral premise of that judgment is an epistemological reflection of the nature of that practice.⁷¹ So, the controversial problem of drawing a normative conclusion from facts does not even arise in Barber's participatory democracy. Action is knowledge, and *is/ought* questions collapse into action, pure and simple. What we do is what is right. This epistemological activity also delineates the limits of the potential and nature of creativity in Barber's democracy. Political thinking is creative insofar as it creates political knowledge through experiential and experimental activity.⁷² Action creates the social world and the moral texture of that social world.

Creativity and imagination do, however, feature elsewhere in Barber's ethics, in his idea of political judgement. In the link between the constant need for action, in a universe empty of any independent universal ground or ontological strata, a limited form of creative imagination may be appropriate. As we have seen, all that stands between us and moral paralysis is decisive action. Left at that, decisive action is a somewhat empty ethical value which could easily drag community life towards uniformity or an overwhelming intolerance. The danger is further exacerbated by the potential for a paralysing scepticism because Barber admits to no ontological strata.⁷³ There is no countervailing impulse, of an ontologically grounded good or virtuous life for instance, to offset the sceptical descent to uniformity or intolerance. Barber attempts to solve this

⁶⁹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 166.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 169.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 259.

problem by drawing upon two consequences of his empty ontology and participatory democracy itself; the first is *empathy and imagination*, the other, *melancholy regret*.

In Barber's view citizenship involves membership of a political community where the individual 'I' becomes a 'we'. Empathy for our fellow citizens and an imaginative reconstruction of the self are the ethical mechanisms through which community coherence is maintained. A continual, active process of 'putting of our self in our neighbour's shoes', through empathic neighbourly action is the key to holding back both the intolerable emptiness of the universe and of holding back intolerance.⁷⁴ In searching for ways to live, we engage each other in an imaginative inter-experimental process. There is a further self-limiting element to Barber's political judgement, which is *regret*.

We and our institutions must, according to Barber, be in a constant state of melancholy for the lost opportunities our decisions create. This is the sine qua non of a politics without independent grounds. Politics is an ethic of exploratory action, the democratic equivalent of Hampshire's "morality as exploratory thinking".⁷⁵ To avoid the negative consequences of political judgement formed through decisive action, we have a civic and human duty to pay the tribute of regret. This is a thoroughly re-active philosophy in which political ethics becomes a pragmatic weighing up of what works and what does not, and what are acceptable and unacceptable risks. All our judgements will be tentative and exploratory, and we will constantly regret the consequences of each course of events, even before we experience them.⁷⁶ We will live in a constant state of melancholy regret for the choices we do not make, the opportunities we fail to pursue. This is the nature of the limit on judgement: how can we be sure, how do you know that I, or we, will not be adversely affected

⁷⁴ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 129.

⁷⁵ Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, New ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982).

⁷⁶ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 259.

by that political judgement?⁷⁷ A radical but melancholy pluralism is the status of Barber's participatory democracy.

The insistence on the lack of ontological strata, where a full human nature might reside, extracts a costly tribute. It is protection money extracted if intolerance and uniformity is to be kept at bay. By imagining ourselves in our neighbour's shoes, not from any common human empathy, we preserve the safety mechanism of regret for what we have not done. It is important that political judgement is not too innovative or imaginative, "since all the suffering that makes us really miserable arises from the disparity..." between the real world and the world of imagination.⁷⁸ For instance, Barber favours those theorists of democracy, Burke, Tocqueville, whose commitment to democracy is somewhat grudging and instrumental to the preservation of social order.

In Barber's world of citizenship, where imagination and philosophy are abandoned for moral security, and solitude and individuality are secondary to the communal will, the whole point of reaching political judgements is to come to a consensus of "the acceptability of risks".⁷⁹ Barber's ethic is thus firmly situated in the fear of isolation, and the imaginative questioning of given social certainties. This is our inheritance from modernity. All this is overshadowed by the constant fear of risk, and the regret of untaken possibility, adrift on an unknowable, storm-tossed and indifferent ocean. It is instructive to note here that Fromm also saw one of the central elements of our human nature as our homelessness, our apartness from solid instinctual footings.⁸⁰ Indeed Fromm also identified the cause in our rational capacity. Nevertheless he does not see this as wholly negative. Because Barber locates one historical epoch, modernity, the enlightenment, as the mistake and because he is further contemptuous of human nature as a concept, his political judgement

⁷⁷ Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*.

⁷⁸ Rousseau, *Julie or the New Heloise*. Cited in Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht."

⁷⁹ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 202.

⁸⁰ Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

is reduced to an act of resistance. Fromm saw this homelessness as one element in the struggle of human being, to achieve the good life promised by our inherent powers, to which many social routes have been charted and can continue to be pursued. Barber seems to be lamenting one historical wrong turn - the universalising project of modernity - and he yearns for some kind of return, or admission that we were wrong to take it.

Liberal Tragedies

Liberal philosophies employ a materialist basis to all their analyses.⁸¹ This is a starting point, or safe harbour, from which their analyses begin and return,⁸² which can only perceive concepts such as freedom and power as antonyms.⁸³ In the liberal social world, therefore, freedom is threatened by power as the two are implacably opposed objects occupying the same physical political space. The state is therefore required to protect freedom from power,⁸⁴ but of course the state then becomes a power, and itself becomes a threat to freedom. Echoing G.D.H. Cole, Barber complains that this importing of inappropriate spatial imagery - Newtonian mechanics principally - distorts our perception and knowledge of social relationships, individual rights, and the state. For instance, Barber wonders whether it makes sense to limit ourselves to asking an individualist question such as “‘How much *room* does friendship leave for self-realisation?’ without considering whether friendship might be a condition for self-realisation.”⁸⁵ They need not be mutually exclusive concepts. Political relations tend to be ‘dialectic, dialogical, symbiotic and ambivalent’. They are *both* individuated and material, *and* interrelated. These dialectical realities, as Barber

⁸¹ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 207, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 26-27.

⁸² Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 28.

⁸³ Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*, 33, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 35.

⁸⁴ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 18-19.

⁸⁵ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 36.

observes, are systematically distorted by liberalism's materialist basis.⁸⁶

This positing of such theoretically undeniable objects or a priori essences is, for Barber, part of a misinformed 'quest for certainty'.⁸⁷ This mistaken quest is both a desire for intelligibility or illumination - a mental condition, and a desire for certainty - a psychological condition.⁸⁸ Of course Barber's discomfort over a need for intelligibility and psychological certainty are the inevitable consequence of his own 'ontological' state of 'adriftness' on a boundless sea.⁸⁹ Certainty, Barber claims, can only be established at the cost of illumination, which is why he posits the ethic of regret, of psychological *uncertainty*.⁹⁰ His use of Hobbesian terms here, 'desire' being one of the passions of appetite and aversion, is informative.⁹¹ Barber sees the quest for certainty as a failing of liberal theorists to get to grips with the nature of politics, and by which they 'conquer politics'.⁹² It is Barber's prescription for citizens that they ought to desire illumination and intelligibility over certainty, this will be forthcoming in communities of moral security and familiarity.

If participatory democratic theory were, however, to have a single conceptual basis, a single shore from which to push our boat out onto the boundless sea, Barber insists that there could only be one logical consequence, only one true notion of politics, rights, obligation, and so forth. The point of inception (A) is taken to be unassailable by any rational person, thus liberal philosophers "marshal all their most formidable philosophical forces in defence of their reasoning from A

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁷ Barber (*Ibid.*, 28, 47.) draws upon Dewey's work for this point, "The quest for certainty is a quest for a peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear which action casts." John Dewey, "The Quest for Certainty," ([1929]), LW4.7.

⁸⁸ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 49-50.

⁸⁹ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 177, 86, 92, Barber, *A Passion for Democracy*, 4-5, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 100, 261-62.

⁹⁰ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 209-11, Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 258-59, 307-10.

⁹¹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 50.

⁹² Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 9-10.

to N, while they leave A unprotected because it is putatively prior to all argument and thus indefeasible."⁹³ Hence this model of the reasoning process, Barber insists, is grossly deficient as a model of political thinking. A commitment to participatory democracy on the basis of groundlessness, he claims, is the only way to weave a strong cable from the many strands of community, which will be stronger and more durable than a great chain forged from discrete links. On the other hand, the fragmented individuals and imaginative solitude of liberal philosophy are the links from which the failing democracy of liberalism is forged.

In the final analysis, liberal democracy is reduced in effect merely to the politics of 'zoo keeping'. It is premised on seeing people as animals which, though they may be admired for their uncomplicated freedom and primal beauty, must be contained.⁹⁴ Thus we are told we must fear each other, and then we are rewarded for good behaviour by being protected from one another. It is a corrosive ideology, which eats away the mutual ties of social fabric, dissolving the strands of the cable of community. In *The Conquest of Politics*⁹⁵ he rails against liberal philosophers, and to a lesser extent Oakeshott, and the corrosive effects of the grounding of their thought in various universal elements or concepts. The liberal democracy which issues from this appears to neglect, in Barber's eyes, various features of human beings, such as interdependency, mutualism, co-operation, fellowship, fraternity, community, and citizenship.⁹⁶ Various evident features of human life such as interactions of friendship, partnership, community, or love, cannot be accounted for in the liberal notion of individual mutual exclusivity. In effect the process of living a human life continually fractures the single self of liberalism into warring

⁹³ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 31.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, 23.

⁹⁵ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*.

⁹⁶ Although Barber himself would probably object, these features could also be described as elements of human nature. He can certainly be interpreted as indicating that these are at least capabilities of human beings: but as he is protesting at their absence in the liberal philosophy of politics and democracy we must assume that he considers them valuable elements, if not desired and needful elements of human life. Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 35.

splinters, or necessarily engages it in relationships with others. Barber's claim is that, in clinging to their grounded certainties, or inertial frameworks, liberal political philosophy is unable to contain these everyday elements of human activity and must either exclude them from its categories of political activity, or make them anathema to politics itself.⁹⁷ Barber's own response is to posit a philosophy of total groundlessness, Oakeshott's open, harbourless sea.⁹⁸

Barber is saying that in order to operate in this world we must throw ourselves open to uncertainty, that we might gain some measure of security and order. We must construct contingent roots in active democratic communities. In Barber's world, uncertainty is a given, unimaginable vastness and shifting horizons are the essence of the world. The immediate results and conditions of our active citizenship are all we can rely on. Liberals indulge in the folly of insisting on knowing something definite about either spirit or matter in order to deduce politics from them, whereas for Barber, politics is always prior to knowledge.⁹⁹ He sees the quest for certainty as a weakness or a folly to be overcome, not as an integral and central element of what it is to be human. Rather than analysing the recurrent emergence, in various forms of the quest for certainty and seeking to explain it, he simply derides it as an error of modernity. He insists that we face the 'fact' of radical uncertainty like grown-ups. Barber accuses Dewey of talking in a patient schoolmasters voice.¹⁰⁰ Barber it seems is a less patient schoolmaster, chiding stubborn children for being children. He no more takes people as they are, than he accuses Rawls or Nozick of. Rather, he wishes them to be as he feels they should, in his thoroughly worked out and elegantly articulated philosophy of non-philosophy.

⁹⁷ See the Pateman chapter below for a parallel attack on liberalism, concentrating on the exclusion of 'troublesome' women from liberal politics.

⁹⁸ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, 127.

⁹⁹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 51.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 52. John Dunn characterises *Strong Democracy* as "an exercise in intellectual moralism." J. Dunn, "Strong Democracy - Barber, B," *Political Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (1986).

The Strong Citizen

Despite his rather jaundiced view of imagination and creativity, Barber does indicate some appreciation of the creativity of participatory democratic politics. Strong democratic politics would have, he suggests, the quality of "a group of men [sic] in a cafeteria constructing new menus, inventing new recipes, and experimenting with new diets" as they seek to create a new public taste which will displace the conflicting private tastes over which they currently attempt to strike compromised bargains.¹⁰¹ This view of creativity is supplemented by an understanding of imagination in participatory democracy as judging which "activates imagination by demanding that participants re-examine their values and interests in light of all the inescapable others - the public."¹⁰² This, however, presses imagination to the service of obliterating new-ness and difference, rather than contributing variety, colour, novelty, or the vibrant stimulation of new transformations in seeing the world and our fellows, of revealing new aspects and potentialities in each and all of us.

Barber's pragmatism can only have the result of ameliorating the worst excesses of existing conditions while re-producing the bulk of them. Perhaps most significant of existing liberal conditions that are thus left relatively unchallenged is the market. Barber is well aware that the 'reality' of atomistic individuals in the market place encourages us to be unimaginative - just as *homo economicus* is a self-interested competitor who is first robbed of imagination, then told that a lack of imagination is a necessity.¹⁰³ A free exchange in a market place would be corrupted by imaginative acts of empathy; you must not consider whether you are selling at a humanly fair price, for instance. In this market example Barber is depicting imagination as empathy, the ability to put oneself in another's position. We have

¹⁰¹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 136-37.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 254. Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad Vs. Mcworld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (N.Y.: Ballantine, 1995), 243-44.

seen how this empathy is an important element in promoting regret in Barber's ethic. In Barber's café, imagination as empathy becomes a utilitarian tool, activated because of the lack of universal grounds in 'strong democracy'. A picture emerges of imagination, not as a free creative act of pulling newness into the world, but an instrumental, practical elaboration *required* of us as active citizens.¹⁰⁴

Who are these citizens that Barber is elaborating his strong democracy for? What are their characteristics which may help or hinder strong democracy? He enumerates a long, three paragraph, list of characteristics of "we Americans" which reveal a curious lack of sociological depth. 'Americans' are, apparently, idealistic yet pessimistically realistic, proud yet humble, imperialistic and nonetheless restrained, intolerant of power, distrustful of moralisers, but prepared to use the law to enforce morality by fiat.¹⁰⁵ Despite being a concordance of binary oppositions it reveals a portrait of an undifferentiated American 'We'. It rests on and presupposes no class, gender, race or religious conflict, no extremes of wealth and poverty, or range of educational opportunity. In sum it amounts to an example of the worst abuses of universalising essentialism.

In possessing these characteristics, being their repository, what purposes should people press them to? Barber makes use of an early, first generation, critical realist, George Santayana, to articulate our stimulus to action:

The problem of knowledge which it most concerns man to solve is not that artificial and retrospective one about the primordial articulation of our dream, but rather the practical progressive problem of applying that dream to its own betterment and of transforming it into the instrument and seat of a stable happiness.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Much in the same way as contemporary, 'third-way', or 'feminised' work-practices require our whole-hearted commitment to the business, we must continually strive to be 'better'. See S. Taylor, "Emotional Labour and the New Workplace," in *Workplaces of the Future*, ed. P. Thompson and C. Warhurst (London: Macmillan, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 254.

¹⁰⁶ George Santayana, *Obiter Scripter* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1963), 15.

Although concurring with much of this sentiment, Barber also finds room to disagree with Santayana's placing of the dream before the action. Political action is autonomous for Barber. Dreams cannot precede it. Before the political action of common striving there is nothing. It is almost as if he is saying that people do not really exist before they join together in common life, where the "dreams that belong to and are engendered by politics ... emerge".¹⁰⁷ Human being is thus emergent, which can only become apparent in reality within some kind of organised communal activity. It is not an ever present consequence of being human, and living a life in conditions of mutual interconnectedness. Once more Barber tends to veer in the direction of social constructionism, but of a very acute, contracted form. Our dreams are *only* politically relevant when decided upon communally, where we are socially constructed in pursuance of the common will, in identifiably 'political' activity. Merely by dint of being human we exist not, we just take up space. He has paradoxically managed somehow to divorce politics, as the enactment of human dreams, from human life while at the same time emphasising how central it is, and why participatory democracy is superior to liberal democracy. Participatory democracy includes many more elements central to being human which liberal democracy must ontologically, epistemologically, and psychologically exclude. These ontological, epistemological and psychological elements, are also however, devalued in Barber's participatory democracy as well.

Barber feels able to cite Marx from the *Eleven Theses* and claim that the essence of man 'is the ensemble of social relationships.' For Barber of course the essence is in the act of choice between membership of a community or isolation.¹⁰⁸ He does not see the ensemble of social relationships as consisting of the ensemble of social structures and conditioning environments. It has more the texture of personal inter-relationship of discourse in a town meeting. He is premising his view of society or political communities in personal relationships rather than the relationship of society to the

¹⁰⁷ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 64.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

individual at the nexus of social forces and structures, as Marx would. What Barber is prescribing is communal citizen activity. We must overcome liberalism's false atomic individualism by gathering together to realise what we have in common. Politics is autonomous activity guided by nothing more than its own process of interaction and coming together in a general will. We are encouraged to see ourselves as individuals at the moment, but politics cannot be done as individuals. Politics is necessarily a communal activity.¹⁰⁹ Presumably he is keen that we should do politics, that politics is a *good and necessary thing*. Political talk and political judging are a *means of building* our general will, not of revealing one which is already there. There is not, for Barber a general, universal human good that can be revealed by politics, rather politics must be undertaken so as to construct it - for order's sake - to find refuge from the chaos and uncertainty around us.

Barber does indeed have a structural basis to his analysis, an inertial frame; it is groundlessness, and it is unavoidable. The only way to survive and prosper is to be 'forced'¹¹⁰ into the General Will. We are adrift and our only recourse is to *order* ourselves into a citizen body, like Fire Ants.¹¹¹ So we *need* order. Imagination and creativity in politics is a utilitarian necessity, not a good or a relationary telos. As such this is the shared lineage of Barber's participatory democracy with Hobbes.

The institutional concrete

What are the institutional consequences of this lineage, this ontological groundlessness? What institutional mechanisms are needed to respond to the human need for order and stability, and

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

¹¹⁰ in Rousseau's sense

¹¹¹ Fire ants have developed a unique method to avoid drowning when heavy rains fall. At the first hint of rising water, worker ants gather the entire colony into a ball. As the water overtakes the mound, the ball rides the flood like a living raft, rolling in the water so all the members can take turns breathing.

how should we reinvigorate our civic life against the unknowable currents and storms of the world? The emphasis in *Strong Democracy*, on the primacy of politics and the necessity of invigorating civic life, leads Barber to present a series of programmatic suggestions of institutionalising three active phases of a strong democracy: talk, decision, and implementation. Barber outlines five criteria which participatory democracy should meet: it must be realistic and workable, not focused on imagined utopian ideals, but rather on pragmatically appropriate arrangements;¹¹² they should complement, and be compatible with, representative democratic institutions, which would remain primary; they should also preserve the liberal strength of minority protection against the tyranny of the majority; they should address themselves and respond to the problems of scale, technology and complexity; finally, they should make possible the governance by citizens rather than the governance of experts, embodying a 'democracy of talk' and a 'democracy of judgement'.¹¹³ He has no illusions about citizens becoming experts themselves, it is not required.¹¹⁴ They need be no more expert than George W. Bush, Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan.

Although Barber's participatory democrats need not, in fact ought not, be experts, any attempt to coalesce a strong participatory democracy must, however, aim to bring together a strong democratic community. The fragmented mobilization of various single interest groups¹¹⁵ will not begin to deliver the benefits of strong democracy while "the public at large has no specified constituency."¹¹⁶ It is his programme of strong democracy which, taken as a whole, is intended to form a coherent programmatic challenge to privatism and alienation, and give birth to a constituency of the public. Any institutional innovation *must* form part of a coherent national

¹¹² Thomas Nagel, "What Makes a Political Theory Utopian?," *Social Research* 56, no. 4 (1989).

¹¹³ Barber, *Strong Democracy*. pp 262-3

¹¹⁴ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 200-01.

¹¹⁵ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 264 n1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

programme of participatory democracy, because “adopted piecemeal or partially, such innovations will at best only be assimilated into the representative adversary system and used to further privatise, alienate and disenfranchise citizens.”¹¹⁷ Barber acknowledges that in a highly individualised political landscape the relatively powerless and voiceless may get left out.¹¹⁸ This will particularly be the case in politics with a distinct separation between mass and elite where mobilisation occurs only around private issues of economic, social, or ethnic interest. To this obvious difficulty Barber can only respond with J.S. Mill’s view that, for both the self-interested and the apathetic, “the taste for participation is whetted by participation: democracy breeds democracy.”¹¹⁹ The central function of ‘strong democracy’ is to create, not strong policy but strong dutiful citizens. Without the ability to identify or even begin a conceptualisation of what might be gained from participation by the subjects of a participatory democracy, questions of why democracy might breed democracy, or what citizens might realise themselves as, are all but unaskable for Barber. This forces our attention towards the nature of the democratic interaction on offer before we can be assured that such whetting might occur.

While Barber is deeply concerned to create spaces and opportunities for democratic talk to be engaged in, through the revitalisation of public spaces in an increasingly privatised American ‘main street’, for example, there is an unmistakeable tone of hectoring in Barber’s prescriptions. More importantly, just as we observed that the striving for moral security instantiates a particularistic communitarianism which may limit membership, it may also limit the potential for, or possible forms of, intercourse and innovation. Let us begin to examine and analyse his mixture of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 264.

¹¹⁸ Richard A. Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, *The Politics of Turmoil: Essays on Poverty, Race, and the Urban Crisis* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975). For more recent explorations of this theme see, Geraint Parry, George Moyser, and Neil Day, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

¹¹⁹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 265.

general and quite specific institutions, around which theories of *democratic talk*, *decision making*, and *action* are to be brought about and supported, by looking at the ways in which democratic talk is to be encouraged.

Strong Democratic talk

The first phase of Barber's democratic politics, the lead-in and preparation for action, is talk. Citizen participation in political talk requires specific sites of interaction to overcome the pervasive atomism of liberal culture, and mechanisms through which the resources of informed talk can be accessed and disseminated. As has already been observed, Barber draws heavily on American experience and history and harks back to the example of the Town Meeting.¹²⁰ Barber envisages Neighbourhood Assemblies, ideally of five thousand citizens, to an upper limit of twenty-five thousand citizens as the core unit of democratic activity. The Walt Whitman Center (WWC) also attempted to promote the providing of facilities in shopping malls for citizen engagement and interaction.¹²¹ The *Agora Coalition*, also a project associated with the WWC, for instance, brings together academics, developers, planners, members of the public, and architects to foster the creation of public spaces desperately lacking in the privatised culture of suburban America.

The Neighbourhood Assemblies are meant initially for talk and debate only. Decision would not come under their preliminary remit, but Barber envisages them developing into voting constituencies for

¹²⁰ See Frank & McCloughry for a analysis of, and paean to, the town meeting tradition in New England. Bryan and McCloughry, *The Vermont Papers: Recreating Democracy on a Human Scale*.

¹²¹ See The Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy. <http://wwc.rutgers.edu>. For examples of Shopping Mall redevelopment, and the New Urbanism (or more tellingly 'Neo-Traditionalism') in Civic/Mall design see, Peter Katz, Vincent Joseph Scully, and Todd W. Bressi, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), James Howard Kunstler, *Home from Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), Ron Sher and Merrit Sher, "Developing and Investing in Local and Community Centers and Highway Retail," in *Shopping Centers and Other Retail Properties: Investment, Development, Financing, and Management*, ed. John Robert White and Kevin D. Gray (New York: John Wiley, 1996).

regional and national referenda,¹²² or community units in systems of civic telecommunications.¹²³ They should have a permanent home, as Fromm's face-to-face groups would,¹²⁴ where deliberation and voting would both take place. Barber also sees an important role for an official neighbourhood facilitator, although his account of their responsibilities seems to be more 'official' and power-laden than Fromm's communication/interaction version.¹²⁵ The horizons of democratic talk are further extended, out of the neighbourhood to the region and the nation, through televised town meetings and the creation of a Civic Communication Co-operative (CCC). It should be noted that there is practically no engagement with economic democracy in Barber's work. All his prescriptions are for non-work civil society. The CCC would be based on the model of the Charter of the BBC. Barber bewails the private sector's lack of interest in civic communication, for which profit making is something of a distant concept.¹²⁶ The mandate of the CCC would be to "promote and guarantee civic and democratic uses of telecommunications, which remain a vital public resource."¹²⁷ Whether the BBC remains as strong a democratic model as it might once have been is questionable.¹²⁸ Embedded in a market oriented environment, its public service ethos is constantly being eroded by the demands of viewing figures and 'value for money'. The CCC service would also need to be supplemented with an education programme. Here Barber is dealing with a much more traditional, interventionist conception of education, as training and instruction rather than the concepts we have seen in Dewey, Cole, and Pateman, of education 'in the widest

¹²² Discussed below in the 'decision phase' of Strong Democracy.

¹²³ Barber, *Strong Democracy*. p.271

¹²⁴ Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*. p.154

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p.155

¹²⁶ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 277.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ For a review of the increasing pressure the BBC is under from fair trading rules, commercial pressures, and some of the implications of this analysis in the context of the Government's Communications White Paper, see G. Born and T. Prosser, "Culture and Consumerism: Citizenship, Public Service Broadcasting and the BBC's Fair Trading Obligations," *Modern Law Review* 64, no. 5 (2001).

sense'. Again, Barber's hectoring moralism resurfaces,¹²⁹ for without *civic education* "democratic choice is little more than the expression and aggregation of private prejudice."¹³⁰ Barber does not seek to replace the realm of *homo economicus*, but to offer the modest challenge of a more civil alternative to markets and their attendant master/slave relationships.

Although extremely concerned with the quality of strong democratic talk Barber seems to pay little attention to strong democratic questioning, whether of a critical sceptical kind or the cheerful wonderment of charitable questioning - however the drive to know may be expressed.¹³¹ He is pursuing a community of shared insight, into the commonalities of citizens in responsible communities, but he avoids, or has no place in his philosophy, for insight into insight, where it comes from, and upon what basis it might rest. This whole process of expanding the possibility of democratic talk is designed to promote both local and more central levels of democratic participation,¹³² and bring the political process home to citizens, from the hinterland of disconnected representatives and experts. As an example, Barber shows how city charters can currently accommodate and empower a wide variety of neighbourhood groups. This draws attention to the constant emergence of single issue groups which often become fully-fledged community organisations. Barber proposes a national system of Neighbourhood Assemblies (NAs) to gather these diverse and often fragmented groups together under the same purpose. Political consciousness begins, he claims, in the neighbourhood, where people talk to each other, and in such talk move towards the source of value in their lives and community. They are here at the beginning of political consciousness. It may be, however, that any utilisation by city charters - pre-existing constitutional structures - will only serve

¹²⁹ See note n99

¹³⁰ Barber, *Strong Democracy*. p.278

¹³¹ see Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

¹³² Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 266.

to domesticate and recuperate any radical voice expressed in such groups. Hence, Barber displays a counterproductive dependence on hierarchic forms of organisation.¹³³

Despite an ontological description of the world and the human condition as boundless, open, and unfixed, he does not seek to utilise this creatively, but struggles to alleviate it through community organisation and systematisation. The open character of the wide variety of neighbourhood groups need not be seen as a fragmented and powerless phenomena. They are dramatic, affective, and expressive;¹³⁴ which makes them incompatible to institutionalising - as drama is unsuited to civic virtue in Barber's view because theatre is corrupting.¹³⁵ The value of such democratic breakouts by single issue, protest, and interest groups is the radical destabilisation of accepted institutional norms, which can evidently be seen as not servicing the civic needs of citizens nearly effectively enough.¹³⁶ These forms of democracy are far more problematic to elite structures of power than Barber is perhaps able, from his position, to admit. The position he occupies is certainly a function of his lack of a firm and non-misanthropic view of human nature. If he were minded to see imaginative reconfiguration and the decolonisation of mind as a way of filling the boundless ocean with creative human interdependence, he might be less fearful.¹³⁷ Instead of withdrawing our imaginative selves into a protective 'circle of wagons' against the void, we could expand our self-understanding and potential to fill it

¹³³ Ricardo Blaug, "Blind Hierarchism and Radical Organizational Forms," *New Political Science* 22, no. 3 (2000), Ricardo Blaug, "Engineering Democracy," *Political Studies* 50, no. 1 (2002).

¹³⁴ Hoggett and Thompson, "Toward a Democracy of the Emotions.", Parry, Moyser, and Day, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*, 15.

¹³⁵ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," cf.

¹³⁶ George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997).

¹³⁷ Abner Cohen, *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements* (Oxford: Berg, 1993).

instead. Barber's suggestion, if not actively seeking to, might well domesticate 'hidden cultures of resistance' and reimagination.¹³⁸

Barber's suggestions for strong democratic institutions next move to how democratic talk can be crystallised into decision. The whole point of politics for Barber is, of course, action. After the talking is done there must come a decision phase, where the state of opinion reached through shared interaction begins to become action.

The decision phase

Central to Barber's participatory democracy, and the move from talk to action via decision, is the institution of a Civic Initiative and Referendum (CI&R) process. Widely used in Switzerland, where most national legislation is initiated and decided upon in this way, and to some extent in a number of American states, the initiative and referendum remains an issue handled sceptically by many governments and their observers.¹³⁹ The fear of popular rule, Tocqueville's 'tyranny of the majority', and a scepticism towards referenda as a sign of weak, vacillating government, reveal both an elite fear of the civic incompetence of the people at large, and popular fears of manipulative elite power.

The data of experience, however, overturn both fears. There is very little evidence of civic incompetence or obstructionism from the many examples of both initiative and referenda in practice. Barber also insists that it is absurd to believe that manipulation by elites can be avoided by further excluding people from possible meaningful participation. Moreover, the educative function of participation will serve as progressive insulation from such manipulation. This will of course depend on the type and motive of education. Barber suggest

¹³⁸ A Mbembe, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony," *Public Culture* 4 (1992).

¹³⁹ For a survey of referenda and citizen initiatives see, Matthew Mendelsohn and Andrew Parkin, *Referendum Democracy: Citizens, Elites and Deliberation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), Maija-Leena Setälä, *Referendums and Democratic Government: Normative Theory and the Analysis of Institutions* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999). For a rather more critical view of citizen initiatives, see David S. Broder, *Democracy Derailed: Initiative Campaigns and the Power of Money* (New York: Harcourt, 2000).

three features to be incorporated into the CI&R process for the purposes of civic education: mandatory links with Neighbourhood Associations (NAs) and TV town meetings; a multiple-choice ballot paper rather than a bald yes/no 'choice'; leading to a two-stage voting process, with a second reading before final legislation. There are two contradictory forces here: mandatory links with the NAs and town meetings; is this a top-down imposition or a bottom-up obligatory duty? It seems to be something of both. The obligatory duty to supply information and a citizen duty to absorb that information. As a consequence there would be a huge amount of paper descending on the NAs. Such a prospect is reminiscent of Walzer's caricature of the life of a participatory democrat,¹⁴⁰ especially as Barber's strong democracy is only an after-work activity.

Civic initiative is a process whereby citizens can petition for a legislative referendum for new laws or on laws which have already been passed by the government. Through this process hasty decisions would be discouraged, but each decision made would also be revisable. As a mechanism to force reflective thought the multiple-choice ballot paper and second reading again emphasises Barber's ethic of duty. The main purpose for Barber in putting forward these measures is the promotion of engaged debate and participation, rather than the production of novel results. The important thing is the opportunity it offers for engaged activity. In effect a National Initiative and Referendum Act would be a way of directing local and national discussion to NAs, town meetings and in the print and broadcast media. The format of the multiple-choice ballot paper¹⁴¹ demands more engaged consideration from citizens than the outright rejection/acceptance of traditional ballot-papers. These are premised on market-type interactions, assuming fixed interests and opinions. In Barber's formulation, however, a necessary consideration of strength of opinion is built in: 'Do I feel strongly enough about this

¹⁴⁰ Michael Walzer, "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," in *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹⁴¹ see Appendix b

to risk alienating a minority?', or 'Is my lack of commitment such that I can live with a minority's wishes on this one?', 'Do I know enough about this issue to have an opinion?' Again we can see Barber's political judgement as motivated by fear of risk and regret, to encourage public thinking and engagement against the isolated private act and process of yea/nay voting. The period between the first and second reading would allow ample time for community reconsideration of all the issues, foreseen and unforeseen, emerging from this first visible expression of communal opinion. The ballot process would also deliver much more information on which to make further judgment. Again we return to perhaps Barber's major purpose in these suggestions, "public talk and political judgment are the goal".¹⁴² The process is about the public effects of knowledge, not to institutionalise what passes for truth and science.

Barber suggests expanding this concept of jury service to far more areas of public office, where specialist knowledge is not a necessity. Jury service remains the only significant public institution filled by lot. Lot filling of local representative and officer posts has a long and ancient history. Barber, however, pays no attention at all to the issue of the likely effects on the role of the permanent administrative and advisory staff that would also be needed. Although he sees lot and rotation as a partial solution to the iron law of the representative oligarchy, the potential of a bureaucratic oligarchy is not considered. He also believes that it would be appropriate for the wealthy to be able to buy their way out of this public service.¹⁴³ Permitting the rich to disenfranchise themselves in this way could be useful in combating exclusion through poverty, he claims. There is however, no mention of the risks of reproducing the two tier society in citizenship here. There is a strong danger that participation in democratic citizenship duties would come to be seen as an egregious burden - something only the poor do because they could not afford to get out of it. He is however opposed to this

¹⁴² Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 288.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 293.

principle being applied to national service.¹⁴⁴ So just as only the poor avail themselves of the freedom to sleep under bridges, they would also be the only citizens to fulfil their share of civic duty, because they could not afford not to. Perhaps Barber believes that the poor need training in civic duty more than the wealthy middle-classes.

Public political choices are usually expressed through the ballot box, but Barber thinks they might also be expressed through market mechanisms. A voucher system could supplement and eventually replace voting decisions on public issues such as housing, education, and transport.¹⁴⁵ He is very wary of this measure, but decides that on balance its ability to avoid state bureaucracy and to activate people in such a way that citizenship too might be stimulated, means that it at least should be considered by participatory democrats. This again is an example of his pragmatism, expressed as an inability to dismiss an amelioration of existing structures, here the market and individualism, no matter how pervasive its negative effects. He believes that the market could produce housing, for example, more effectively than the state, and that individuals making their own choices enables them to control their own destiny. This is the ideological language of neo-liberalism. Barber has elsewhere offered a scathing criticism of the corrosive effects of liberal individualism, "The ideology of choice seems to liberate the body... but fatally constricts the possibility of real freedom for the soul."¹⁴⁶

Into action

Once decisions have been made, and public choices formed, they must then be translated into action. The components of strong democratic talk and participatory democratic decision making are thus transformed into the active life of the strong democratic community. National Service is seen by Barber as a "vital constituent in the relationship between rights and duties under a strong

¹⁴⁴ See below for details of this national service concept.

¹⁴⁵ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 293-98.

¹⁴⁶ Barber, *Jihad V Mcworld*, 220.

democratic regime.”¹⁴⁷ This deontological ethic of a reciprocity of rights and duties is a common element in third-way and communitarian politics.¹⁴⁸ Rights are all very well, when they are given to us, but they remain externally defined and delimited rights. Barber’s fear however is that, even if resting on a healthy citizen body “[a] people that will celebrate its rights but is not willing to defend them directly will soon be without a cause for celebration.”¹⁴⁹ Barber considers that a career army is unacceptably skewed towards those who have fewer life choices, the poor and the uneducated, and that some form of compulsory service would lead to a much more efficient armed forces, as well as be civically educational. Service of one or two years would enlist everyone, not only in the Department of Defense [sic], but also in an Urban Defense Corps, a Rural Defense Corps, an International (Peace) Corps, and a Special Services Corps. These various corps would be the setting for expanded government employment and training programs. At the same time he sees them as further reinforcing democracy. All manner of civil projects are envisaged as being carried out by this compulsory citizen army. The work they undertake is aimed at introducing people to the dignity of service, rather than the dignity of labour.

The dignity of service flows from Barber’s commitment to the primacy of politics in his moral community serving a strong civil democracy. Economic democracy comes some distance behind. This is amply reflected in his section on workplace democracy. Of the forty pages dedicated to his programme of concrete proposals in *Strong Democracy* to institute participatory democracy, less than one page (305) is taken to consider democracy in the workplace. Given the amount of time alone that work occupies in our lives this is remarkable. Further, this page merely observes that there are a

¹⁴⁷ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 298.

¹⁴⁸ Tony Blair and The Fabian Society, *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century, Fabian Pamphlet; 588* (London: Fabian Society, 1998), Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (London: Profile, 1997), Amitai Etzioni and Demos, *The Third Way to a Good Society* (Demos.Organisation, 2000).

¹⁴⁹ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 298.

great number of proposals for democratisation of the workplace that are "in tune with strong democracy." Barber then refers his readers to three journals¹⁵⁰, and one book - *Economic Democracy* - and leaves it at that.¹⁵¹ He does not seem terribly interested in workers' control.

Concluding comments

Oddly, for a theorist committed to debunking and dismissing all a priori metaphysics from participatory democratic theory, Barber claims in *Jihad vs McWorld* that neo-liberalism "fatally constricts the possibility of real freedom for the soul".¹⁵² It seems that Barber's commitment to an ontology of groundlessness and non-being fails to remove entirely from his heart the need for a conception of human nature, however 'thin' its substance. For the most part, Barber takes a very jaundiced view of the human situation. The ontological environment in which human being huddles is cast adrift on an unknowable, boundless, and harbourless sea. Humanity, in Barber's view, has been cut from its moorings by modernity's gift of reason. The power of our reason freed us from the bindings of mystification and fixed feudal hierarchies, but it has also encouraged a dangerously unfettered imagination to roam free across politics and democratic forms.

Where Barber, however, finds the imaginative acts of philosophers as pernicious to politics, and particularly to democracy, a clearer approach may be to treat philosophers, and the 'act' of philosophising as an essentially human, political act which must be more democratically distributed. The insistence of critical realism on the 'reality' of non-empirical strata, for instance, enables us to place the imaginative aspects of individual and social being in a rather more important and productive relation to democratic theory. The use of theoretical concepts, metaphors and similes, to grasp certain

¹⁵⁰ *Working Papers, Dissent, and Democracy*

¹⁵¹ Martin Carnoy and Derek Shearer, *Economic Democracy: The Challenge of the 1980s* (White Plains, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1980).

¹⁵² Barber, *Jihad V Mcworld*, 220.

non-observable, but nonetheless real phenomena, central to critical realist epistemology, would be an effective divergence from Barber's misanthropic view of human community. His rather hierarchical and civic attitude to art, for instance, rather than protecting politics from imagination, actually denies politics an essential human dimension.

Our position between instinctual 'brute' nature, and rational creative intervening bestows the human world with a paradox, certainly, but it also provides a metaphysical capacity to introduce reasoned novelty into the universe. The response of a participatory democratic theory justified on critical realist grounds, with a 'thick' conception of human nature, would turn Barber on his head and insist that what philosophers and artists do *is* politics, and what participatory democrats are capable and desirous of *is* philosophical, creative, deeply engaged, realisatory political activity. Barber's very act of picturing the universe as groundless compels him to picture politics as a striving for security in moral communities of certainty. Thus, where his political ontology 'rests' on boundless non-being, his implicit human ontology obliges the response of particularistic communitarian democratic politics. His human agents need security, form and content, and their emergent powers bring these into being in participatory democratic communities. Barber wants a common will to be realised, for us to come to see what we share in common.

The institutional structures of liberal representative democracy seem to corrode moral responsibility and attenuate the concept of citizenship, so much as to all-but dissolve the bonds of community completely. Barber sees the human world as structured awry by philosophers and theorists, by the malignant influence of misplaced imagination, and by the conquest of politics by philosophy. Democracy can only be redeemed, therefore, through structural changes.

Barber locates the source of the malign structural, democratic consequences in liberal philosophy's insistence on 'inertial frameworks', on universal essential grounds. Redemption of the democratic world requires structural changes, and this requires a vision of the structural problems and possibilities facing us. All

change must begin with the individual citizen, but this requires a deep understanding of their motives, needs and capabilities which are neither unrealistically sceptical or optimistic. Numerous though Barber's prescriptions are, his total dismissal of the concept of human nature leaves his participatory democracy empty of self-realisatory politics. The ethical revivification his participatory democracy requires cannot but remain thinly theorised. A critical realist analysis reveals that Barber commits the epistemological fallacy, relying far too heavily on the factual surface of social reality. This results in a hollowed-out ethical form. Although Barber's institutional prescriptions are admirably pragmatic, without an explicit and deeply theorised ethical commitment, 'the possibility of real freedom for the soul' cannot begin to be realised.

Chapter 6 - Carole Pateman

In this chapter I examine Pateman's work in a thematic order which begins near the present-day, and works its way back in time, before returning to some more recent material. This serves two purposes: firstly to clarify the founding theoretical elements of her participatory democratic theory which indicate the presence of a concept of human nature. Secondly, the chapter seeks to show that this underlying presence of a concept of human nature provides a unifying pulse in all her work. From her early work on industrial democracy, through her feminist turn, to her more recent interest in basic income, Pateman's concern throughout is the construction of a democracy predicated on the idea of a participatory society. Central to her argument is a critique of the partiality of liberalism. This is expressed in the liberal 'story' of the social contract, a fiction which is told and re-told to create and maintain a particular political, and economic regime. For Pateman, it is an insidious and consistently misleading story. Its power is so comprehensive that many other forms of political theory - modern republicanism, socialism, communism - seem unable to entirely divest themselves of its influence.¹ Consequently, Pateman is driven to ask: why would anybody consent to be ruled by someone else? On what basis is consent given to government? What obligation is that consent exchanged for? What are the ontological bases which enable such a concept to be imagined? In the final analysis, in Pateman's view, the philosophical core of liberal democratic theory can provide no convincing answer to these questions. This theme, which recurs throughout her work, is pursued at length in *The Problem of Political*

¹ Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), Anna Yeatman, "Carole Pateman, the Social Contract," *Thesis Eleven* 26 (1990).

Obligation.² It also reappears in different form in an important recent paper where it is explained in greater depth.³

In her first book, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970) Pateman makes a convincing case against 'realist' empirical theories of democracy, and consequently against elitist versions of liberal democracy. She follows a similar path in *The Problem of Political Obligation* by persuasively and systematically making the case for participation as the basis for a truly free and equal society. Participation in the life of a polity broadens and deepens, through its psychological and educative effects, the lives and characters of individuals and the society they form. In *Participation & Democratic Theory*, making extensive use of Rousseau, J.S. Mill, and G.D.H. Cole, she sets out a vision of democracy as consonant with an enduring human need for free, creative and interdependent social activity.

On the face of it, Pateman's close (re)reading of the classics of liberal thought, in *The Disorder of Women* and *The Sexual Contract*, show the possibilities for emancipatory political progress to be at a grim impasse.⁴ Liberalism's ability to recuperate all progressive advances towards women's equality seems total. Democracy, has never, and still does not exist for women, claims Pateman.⁵ The two sexes are differently embodied and may be incommensurably opposed.⁶ The social and political manifestations of this differentiated embodiment, however, are largely 'ascribed' differences which are the result of fictional story-telling. Pateman makes it plain that, although the tightly interdependent relationship of public and private or domestic have effectively been elided to affect the nature of women's citizenship, there is nothing 'natural' in this. There is no 'natural' reason why men cannot share child-

² Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*.

³ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

⁴ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*.

⁵ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

rearing and domestic duties, just as there is no 'natural' reason that women should be denied an autonomous public persona.⁷

There is a continuity running through all of Pateman's work, based on the idea of individual autonomy in a participatory society grounded in a participatory democracy. She displays great skill in exposing how exclusions of women and of some aspects of all human life, in theoretical accounts and in practice, go unnoticed or are side-stepped. Narrow conceptions of the political, which exclude large areas of human life from the remit of democracy, divide people from each other and themselves. She has consistently shown how important, and possible it is to extend the political, first into the workplace and then into the domestic, in order that as essentially political, interdependent creatures, we might have coherent influence over *all* areas of *all* our lives.

I begin by examining Pateman's critique of liberal social contract theory, which in turn highlights her consistent concern with the desirability of a participatory democracy. From the outset she is concerned to challenge the notion of obligation towards any existing political regime and representative democracies. More recently she has also challenged the notion of 'property in the person' as a core liberal justification for the employment contract, and for gender relations. This development will be examined in relation to her first published work, *Participation and Democratic Theory* as it represents an important intervention into the area of industrial democracy and workers' control. Together with her advocacy of basic income as a democratic tool, these are telling contributions to an ontological justification for participatory democracy. Between these two points of Pateman's work her extension of the critique of contract theory into gender relations, particularly the marriage contract, and the gendered nature of citizenship in representative democracy, both of the left and the right, will be examined.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

Obligated to who, for what?

In Pateman's view liberalism is built on certain premises or views of human nature. The liberal subject is assumed to be rational, capable of independent judgement, evaluation, and reflexive action, and is an abstract individual. Pateman indicates the presence of an ethical element here also, which implies that individuals have the capacity to act responsibly, to evaluate their action, and make rational choices about what they ought to do.⁸ In effect, however, the liberal state and liberal democracy pushes these qualities and the ethic aside. In maintaining the power of the state to ensure individual freedom, liberal theory contradicts itself by creating an obligation of obedience to a power effectively beyond individual control. Pateman is obviously committed to the qualities of rational judgment, evaluation and reflexive action (although definitely not abstract individualism) but she seeks a political form, participatory democracy, which is not internally contradictory. She insists that political obligation to the state raises insoluble problems for liberal theory because of its insistence on individual consent. Pateman further argues that obedience to government is actually what is required by the liberal state, and that this is constantly threatened by liberalism's insistence on individual choice. She suggests that political obligation is merely a theoretical and ideological façade for the necessity of obedience. The acts of voting, or of tacit consent through acceptance of benefits or other state goods, are poor justifications for this necessary obedience. Intermittent opportunities to vote, the cornerstone of liberal democracy's legitimation, are further problematic because elections are supremely manipulable events. In addition those who fail to use their vote are consistently found to be from the lower socio-economic categories.⁹ Those

⁸ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 15. "The idea of self-assumed obligation, on the face of it, leads to some fairly straightforward conclusions about individuals, their capacities and their social relationships. It implies that obligations can exist only if individuals have knowingly and deliberately, after reasoned reflection about the consequences of taking such a step, decided to enter such a relationship."

⁹ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

abstaining from the vote also tend to be disproportionately female.¹⁰ Political obligation, if it is a sustainable concept at all, appears to be differentially distributed.¹¹ For Pateman, "the problem of political obligation can be solved only through the development of the theory and practice of participatory or self-managing democracy."¹²

Political obligation is variously presented by liberals as a promise, an agreement, a contract or as consent. Each of these imply a different emphasis which tend to leave it an inconsistent concept. More than this, it leads to an internal contradiction in liberal political theory. Pateman considers this a somewhat mindful confusion, because "theorists of political obligation rarely consider, for e.g., why the practice of obligation is a valuable one, or what it implies about the capacities and potentialities of individuals; they rarely consider why they are concerned with political *obligation* rather than political *obedience*."¹³ Pateman points out that liberal theorists are unable to allow themselves to consider obligation as obedience as this would undermine liberalism's claim to be the best protector and propagator of individual liberty. If a citizen's relationship to the liberal state is not a problematic concept, the state can just be accepted as it is. Such passive acceptance of the state confirms it as a natural feature of the world. Each new generation of citizens is born into a ready-made, naturally occurring reality. Liberalism claims, however, to be based on the rejection of subordinate political relationships to 'natural' authority. The active adoption, and by implication the rejection, refusal, or renegotiation, of the terms of political obligation, in a participatory democracy by all persons should be the result.

¹⁰ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

Himself is alone

What then of the capacities and potentialities which political obligation imputes to the liberal citizen? It must be that there *are* these many positive capabilities and potentialities alluded to above. Pateman insists, however, that the actual practice of liberal democracy denies these, or takes them as given without fully engaging with them. At best liberal representative democracy provides weak institutional arrangements to support or give expression to them, but generally the institutional arrangements of liberal democracy seem to have been designed without these capacities and potentialities to the fore. Pateman points out that the concept of a self-assumed obligation is rarely examined for its implications about the disposition of social relationships, or what is required if it is to exist throughout social life. Liberalism insists that the abstract individual manages all by 'him' self. On the contrary, Pateman maintains that self-assumed obligation is *not* an incoherent idea, indeed it is central to democracy. The problems associated with self-assumed obligation are actually artefacts of a specific theoretical perspective; abstract individualism. She separates 'liberal' from 'democracy' in the unquestioned symbiotic relationship of 'liberal democracy'. The specific liberal concept of political obligation is indeed problematic. The *democratic account* of political obligation, however, has been constantly available, although often resisted or derided, offering us solutions to the problem of political obligation.¹⁴

The democratic account has been, and remains a critique of, and an alternative to, liberal versions of what is required to give expression to the practice of self-assumed obligation. Democratic subjects are quite different human beings from the liberal, isolated, possessive individuals.¹⁵ Pateman sees political obligation not only as an undeniable fact, but also as normatively necessary for the

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ This is MacPherson's suitably fitting phrase. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Clarendon Press, 1962).

sustainable (self)governance of any socially organised creature, and an essential element of human society. There is a similarity here with Cole's view that, before we can form any philosophical conception of the principles on which social and political institutions rest, we must know what human motives and distortions of human motive are actually present in them. We cannot therefore quite join with Rousseau, and shout "'Away with all the facts!' although in our conclusions the facts drop away and only questions of right remain."¹⁶ Political obligation is not, however, an individual, intermittently represented *gift*, but a participatory, renewable *activity* - an activity which people are not only capable and competent of, but also needful and desirous of.¹⁷ Whereas it is difficult to theoretically and practically sustain in its liberal democratic form, it could, however, be sustainable in a participatory society, where obligation is continually given and re-negotiated. Political obligation must be premised on political activity as a *virtue*, rather than as an individually instrumental enterprise.

For the abstract individual, obligation is, however, problematic, as it places a restriction on that individual's freedom. How could a promise to act in such and such a way, for instance to obey the law that a representative may pass in an unspecified future, bind such an individual? The possessive individual could never accept that there are good reasons for any constraint on his action or his will.¹⁸ It would make no sense to him to accept the constraint of a fixed contractual promise, except to preserve his good reputation, his promise being his bond. If this last point is admitted, which it need not be in substance, as *appearance* is all in such matters, his abstraction from society at large, from others, is compromised. Promising is a social practice, engaged-in during the course of a

¹⁶ Cole, *Social Theory*, 21.

¹⁷ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14. Pateman's pointed use of the masculine gender is preserved here "[T]he 'individual in liberal theory usually has been, and continues to be, seen as male; a male who possesses even the property that a female has in her person.'"

communal life.¹⁹ A promise "is constitutive of the social matrix in which individuals find themselves and act".²⁰ An act of promising is sustainable if the individual voluntarily places themselves in the obligation relationship. What, however, of *necessary* human relationships? Pateman indicates that we are obligated simply by our inter-connected sociability.²¹ The self-assumed obligation of the abstract individual is a necessary consequence of the liberal ideal of individual freedom and equality. Seen in these terms such an obligation needs continual justification. To be voluntary, the individual's obligation must be to continually question the political authority over them. It can never be taken for granted. The stability of liberal democracies must be continually challenged by this formula. Another way of locating a commitment to obligation, which does not continually threaten the stability or legitimacy of the liberal state, is through the concept of hypothetical voluntarism through tacit, implied, or explicit actions and their consequences. Pateman takes issue with such interpretations, where voluntary obligation is interpreted by the theorists on behalf of the individuals concerned, as consent to the liberal state.

The standard liberal political manifestation of promising is voting. A vote in a representative democracy is a promise to obey the laws the resulting government enacts. This, however, initiates a flow of obligation in only one direction, which "involves a 'subordination to the judgement of others', to the judgement and decision of representatives."²² By contrast, direct or participatory voting allows citizens to order their political and social lives for themselves, to decide when and what to assume obligations to. These decisions are made in collective and political capacities rather than as private

¹⁹ Ibid., 25. Similar comments are made in Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

²⁰ Charles Taylor, "Hermeneutics and Politics," in *Critical Sociology*, ed. P. Connerton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 177., cited in Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 27.

²¹ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 14.

²² Ibid., 17. Once again the influence of Rousseau is apparent.

individuals engaged in private lives. Participatory democratic voting creates a relationship of political obligation towards all our fellow citizens.²³ This is the *only* way that political obligation can properly flow from an act of a citizen.

Pateman argues that self-assumed obligation and abstract individualism have shared a common historical origin. In liberalism they are falsely seen as vitally associated with each other. This produces deeply problematic effects. The abstract, or possessive individual is presented as 'naturally' free and equal to each other abstract individual. But of course, however free and equal these individuals may be born, they are neither born fully formed, nor outside a network of social relationships. Pateman deplors the concept of the abstract individual as a poor characterisation of human being precisely because it is *abstracted* from this social reality. In the case of the liberal individual that social reality is the reality of the capitalist, market economy, and the representative democratic state.²⁴ The characteristics of the inhabitants of that society are thus *abstracted from* the product of the relationships of that society. Self interest and profit chasing are therefore seen as 'natural'. This is an important tool of justification for liberal democratic society, but Pateman holds that this ideological characterisation is false.²⁵ This implies that there is another, less false characterisation. An individual seen in the abstract, in complete isolation from other beings, will of course be seen as acting "solely on his own subjective viewpoint - what other viewpoint is there for such a creature?"²⁶ Such a being's reasoning "will be entirely self-interested; he will act if, and only if, he judges it to be for the benefit of himself and his property."²⁷ This has deeper consequences for the conceptualisation of human being when the

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

idea of property in the person is also factored into the liberal world view, as shall be seen below.

Pateman considers one alternative to abstract individualism which is to see social life as *necessarily* involving the idea of obligation. Here unless it is understood that we have an obligation to others, to keep promises, we cannot understand what it means to be a member of a society. These are *necessary conceptual connections* that abstract individualism cannot accept. Pateman objects, however, to this particular alternative to abstract individualism. Rather than necessary obligation she prefers a much more active, reflexive consent to the implied passive acceptance of pre-given actions in 'obligation'. There are, she insists, certain basic human behaviours - of mutual aid, forbearance, assistance, and support to the sick and injured - morally worthy practices which we *ought* to perform, but which, if we were obliged to undertake would undermine our capacity for rational judgement and action.²⁸ Further, if such imperatives are not 'oughts' they deny our social inter-relationships and our creative social capacities. 'Ought' and 'obligation' must be distinguished one from the other. We are bound by our obligations, but we are also free and superior to them, at one and the same time. This is central to our capacity for rational judgement and action, and to the value of obligation. If they were not separate concepts we would be left with two alternatives to explain promising, both of which would attempt to separate individuals from their social practices.

Pateman maintains that 'obligation' reduces individual choice to the acceptance or recognition of pre-existing 'rules' of duty, independent of any conduct or situation of lived experience. On the other hand, abstract individualism focuses on individuals' capacity to create obligations. It can say, however, nothing about the rules and oughts which should guide them. The individual would be superior to their political obligations, but the binding nature of those obligations would be incomprehensible "if the two dimensions of self-assumed obligation are to be given their due weight", neither the mutuality of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

social life nor an individuals' creative social capacity must be emphasised at the expense of the other.²⁹ At the moment of decision the individual is still unbound, unconstrained and abstracted from society, but only at that moment. To take this abstraction as the whole of the matter, removed from the social framework which informed it, and from the social fabric in which it will be performed, creates the contradiction of political obligation in representative liberal democracy.³⁰ Such a mistake only comes about, according to Pateman, because we possess a capacity for critical reflection, we are able to examine the process of assuming an obligation and identify its moments. To take from this process one moment, however, and expand it into a full theory of the individual is fallacious. We are more than a single moment, we are the sum of our life and our network of social relationships. This same critical capacity for reflective action which has been allowed to abstract us from our social environment must be employed to the whole problem of self-assumed obligation and appropriate forms of political organisation.

A democratic theory, as opposed to a liberal democratic one, is a theory of inter-relationships. It involves relations between individuals, individuals and their social and political institutions, between political theory and practice, and between ideas and social life. Liberal theory, however, tries to separate and isolate elements which are not independent. Her democratic insistence on the interrelatedness of each of us, and of our institutions, assumes a profound significance when Pateman begins to engage with feminism. She introduces the feminist struggle in to democratic theory as a struggle not merely for the formal equality of suffrage, nor merely for liberal forms of freedom.³¹ What is demanded by women is recognition as individuals, as men have been by liberal theory for

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³¹ Ibid., 175-76.

three centuries.³² Women insist on being accorded the standing of autonomous individuals who are able to enter into the practice of freely and equally assuming political obligation. The freedom and equality demanded by women presuppose each other. This demand, while particularly progressive for women also finds expression in much non-feminist resistance to liberalism.

The persistence of a 'natural morality', an ideology of naturally possessive individuals, and of women as naturally emotionally unsuited for public life, would appear to make a self managing democracy and society a utopian idea.³³ Pateman, ironically, takes Rousseau's presupposition of moral regeneration as a method by which this could occur. The political consciousness of people is much more complicated than liberal theory suggests, and the nature of human subjects is not ahistorically given, but is the result of our friendships, love, solidarity and relationships, as well as of self-interest. As Pateman points out:

[I]t is during their social life together that individuals learn how to co-operate, and in which they develop the capacities necessary for the creation and maintenance of a voluntarist social order. Hopes for the future depend upon the potentiality for social and political education, and upon social and political action and organisation, not the magical beginnings of social contracts.³⁴

Hence, for Pateman, we are social creatures, born into an existing social network, which provides the groundwork on which to build a democratic political society.

³² Pateman, "Freedom and Democratization.", Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

³³ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 2.

³⁴ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 177.

Private into Public 1: Extending the Reach of Democracy.

Nine years before the above statement, Pateman published her first work, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, which begins by describing how certain theorists of democracy, in the first half of the twentieth century,³⁵ sought to describe and account for the contemporary form of democracy. In doing this they reinterpreted what democracy should mean so as to justify the existing situation as 'true' (or at least as the best feasible) democracy. Against this Pateman suggests that what these practitioners of the 'Contemporary Theory of Democracy' called 'Classical Democracy' is entirely *mis*-represented as utopian, unworkable, and dangerous. She makes the case that democracy is necessarily a participative form and that it is far from dangerous and unrealistic, but entirely suited to human being and is indeed self-regulating and legitimating, unlike the various forms of elite rule embodied in the 'Contemporary Theory of Democracy'.

In *Participation and Democratic Theory* Pateman shows that participation is an essential element of democratic theory, properly considered, and that it brings psychological and educational benefits to both the polity as a whole and to the individuals involved. The basis upon which such conclusions are implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, built will here be examined. In her subsequent work, both published and experienced, Pateman has thoroughly reconstructed her theoretical position, most especially under the influence of the feminist movement, and contemporary and earlier feminist thought. Indeed her main contribution to political thought has been through her exposure of the fundamentally gendered nature of liberal citizenship. Throughout all of these progressions, however, a commitment to the value of participation remains.

³⁵ Her targets are: B.R. Berelson, "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1952), Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, *Voting*, Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory*, H. Eckstein, "A Theory of Stable Democracy," in *Division and Cohesion in Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 1966), Sartori, *Democratic Theory*, Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*.

Pateman insists that contract is a fiction because it is exclusive, (particularly of women) and necessarily patriarchal, and that participatory democracy is the basis of a wholesale reformulation not just of democracy but of the political itself. It makes obvious the exclusion of half the human race and moves towards correcting that situation. A participatory democracy in a participatory society would give men the benefit of a female political sensibility, and remove women from the apolitical exclusionary slavery which liberal contract marginalizes them to. Pateman thus begins to outline an ontology of equal worth for being, and a version of Aristotelian wholeness of the human subject. Although Pateman raises the issue of differential citizenship, men and women being so different that total human equality would be excluded,³⁶ she also states that universals are sought and demanded by the excluded.³⁷ Thus it can be legitimately inferred that she thinks difference is the last resort of the elite. Indeed although the egalitarianism and universalism of liberal modernity is revealed as "fatally flawed by the construction of its central categories in terms of the ascriptive differences of men and women",³⁸ universalism is not entirely erased from her thought.³⁹ In this context 'ascriptive' is a telling word, implying that this difference is false, and overcome-able.

In drawing upon J.S. Mill and Rousseau, Pateman indicates that she shares their concern for the establishment and maintenance of a democratic polity as a whole, within a participatory society, not merely with an efficient democratic regime. She approvingly quotes Davis in that the purpose of participatory theory is to educate an

³⁶ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 102.

³⁷ Pateman, "Democracy and Democratisation: Presidential Address: XVIth World Congress, IPSA."

³⁸ Mitchell Dean, "Pateman's Dilemma: Women and Citizenship," *Theory and Society* 21 (1992).

³⁹ It is interesting to note what Pateman has to say about democracy and universalism in her Presidential Address to the International Political Science Association, "it needs to be emphasised that for three centuries universalist ideas have been seized upon and utilized by the excluded as part of their efforts to win inclusion or bring about political change." (Pateman, "Democracy and Democratisation: Presidential Address: XVIth World Congress, IPSA," 10.).

entire people so that "their intellectual, emotional, and moral capacities have reached their full potential and they are joined, freely and actively in a genuine community."⁴⁰ The method by which this bold project is to be pursued is through "political activity and government for the purpose of public education."⁴¹ Pateman finds the specific prescriptions and plans for action in J.S. Mill, Rousseau, and, of particular importance for modern large-scale industrial society, G.D.H. Cole. Thus Pateman can be seen as an educationist of a sort,⁴² but she also draws our attention to participatory democracy for its ability to reconstruct politics to enable *all* citizens to attain a full human existence.

Beginning with Rousseau, "the theorist *par excellence* of participation",⁴³ Pateman insists on the centrality of the interaction of psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals with their political institutions. The society in which these individuals operated should be one of economic equality and independence, although, as Pateman observes in a remark which seems prescient, Rousseau denied that absolute equality was required, merely a high degree of economic equality which would foster political equality. No-one should be rich enough to buy another, nor so precariously placed as to have to sell themselves. What is important for Rousseau, and by implication for Pateman, especially in light of her future feminist turn, is *economic* security and independence, which translates into *political* equality and independence. Such economic equality is a right which delivers freedom, thus freedom is the basic starting point, but economic equality underpins political freedom. This freedom is to be enabled, in Pateman's later work as we shall see, through a universal basic income.

⁴⁰ L. Davis, "The Cost of Realism: Contemporary Restatements of Democracy," *Western Political Quarterly* 17 (1964): 40-1. cited in Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 21.

⁴¹ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 21.

⁴² This is examined in some detail below.

⁴³ A view she was to alter fundamentally later, in light of the influence of feminist theory. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 6.

Pateman notes that interdependence was also cemented into Rousseau's political system. Each citizen was powerless to do anything without the co-operation of all the others. This is as much a consequence, a necessity, of being a social creature as a consequence of political artifice.⁴⁴ Rousseau's system is based on the centrality of participation, which allows us to see how the human personality and social conditions structure each other. It highlights the educative role of participation. As Pateman states on a number of occasions, this is "'education' in the widest sense".⁴⁵ What, however, is this 'widest sense'? Pateman gives a brief list of its elements as: the development of responsible, individual, social, and political action.⁴⁶ During this process each individual will be confronted with the necessity of broadening their personal horizons beyond their own immediate private interests, while at the same time sensing their own self in others. They will find they have to take into account wider matters if they are to gain co-operation from others.⁴⁷ This is not merely, although undeniably partly, a matter of instrumental expediency. Individuals are 'forced' (as in 'undeniably led') to deliberate according to their own indwelling sense of justice, what Rousseau calls their 'constant will'. The result of participating in decision-making, as Pateman observes, is that the individual "is educated to distinguish between his own impulses and desires, [and] learns to be a public as well as a private citizen."⁴⁸ What she calls 'the human consequences of participation' provide its central justification.⁴⁹

The participatory theory of J.S. Mill is also marshalled to the same cause. Pateman notes, how for Mill the business side of government,

⁴⁴ MacIntyre convincingly shows that this is the case. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999). As we have observed, G.D.H. Cole also made the same claim in *Social Theory*.

⁴⁵ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 82-83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-25, 55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

the protecting of given material and psychological states of affairs, are most definitely not either the whole, or the most important concerns of a democratic purpose. Development and education in a participatory democracy provides, "a great influence acting on the human mind... including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency."⁵⁰ These qualities must already be present if participation is to *develop* them and it is the exercise of these qualities (or 'growth' as Dewey would have it) which is important, rather than the mere possession of pre-given legislatively protected rights. These qualities will form part of a human nature of which Pateman is also aware. She further observes, however, that these qualities, of intellect, of rational thought oriented towards activity and inclusive judgment, if they are not present and exercised in participatory political activity will be exercised elsewhere, as a negative reaction to a slavery of mind and condition.⁵¹ The individual that is only concerned with self-serving interests and does not participate in public affairs atrophies, not only their capacity for responsible public action, but also those self-regarding 'virtues' they throw themselves back on. Those consumed with private money-getting activities use few of their faculties and become turned inward on themselves.⁵² This is unfortunate not because it is morally undesirable, although it may also be this as well, but because it is incomplete and partial, and does the self a disservice. It is a misleading and unbalanced fiction.

Just as a dominant environment of individualist, market liberalism nurtures and strengthens certain character traits, so a participatory system would nurture and enable certain qualities. *Participation and Democratic Theory* was partly inspired by the explosion of interest in participation at the end of the 1960s, as Pateman explains in the first

⁵⁰ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1948), 195. Cited in Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 27.

⁵¹ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 29.

⁵² John Stuart Mill and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *On Liberty: Representative Government. The Subjection of Women; Three Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 230., cited by Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 30. Fromm examines these consequences in detail, see Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

paragraph of her book. The Paris événements were perhaps the most spectacular manifestation of this, but the American civil rights movement and the Shop Steward movement in Britain were similar manifestations. Participation became part of the popular political vocabulary in the demands by various groups for the practical implementation of rights of participation that were theirs in theory.⁵³ These demands even found their way into official discourse, in attenuated and recuperated form. For instance, in the Bullock Report of 1977, and more recent discussions around European Works Councils.⁵⁴

If liberal political structures, and its particular political form, liberal-democracy, were consonant with human nature such challenges would not emerge and re-emerge. This provides a further link to Pateman's later feminist turn: the realisation of gaps in liberalism which lived experience, particularly of subordinate groups, continually exposes. The foundation of Pateman's account of participatory democracy is that there is a necessary interrelationship between the structures of democratic institutions and the sense of identity and motivations of individuals.⁵⁵ This amounts to an 'essentialist affirming' attachment to human nature. A participatory democracy would foster the conditions for the realisation of the human being that we are not (yet). Instead of being, in Marx's phrase, 'spontaneous and free activity', work, for instance, becomes an instrument of degradation and dehumanisation.⁵⁶ Alienated labour, and its part-time political costume the lion-skin of citizenship, degrades men's free activity to a means.⁵⁷ The role of political

⁵³ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 1.

⁵⁴ Alan Bullock, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy, Cmnd ; 6706* (London: H.M.S.O., 1977). Brian Bercusson and Institute of Employment Rights, *European Works Councils: Extending the Trade Union Role* (London: Institute of Employment Rights, 1997), Hans-Wolfgang Platzer, Bernhard Nagel, and Wolfgang Lecher, *The Establishment of European Works Councils: From Information Committee to Social Actor* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

⁵⁵ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 27.

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. Lucio Colletti (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 329.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

participation in enabling us to become what we are not, but want to, and can be, is explored in Nathan Teske's *Political Activists in America*.⁵⁸ This work is especially useful when linked to Pateman's definition of work as much more than paid employment, but as social activity.

In her discussion of the role of work in an individual's wider life there is a very strong emphasis on the wage slavery argument - the deadening effect of much industrial work. This characterisation could quite easily be made more relevant to a post-Fordist economy, to refer to call-centre work for example, which is just as tightly controlled, despite not being dirty or physically demanding as the heavy industry of the first half of the twentieth century. G.D.H. Cole held that slavery was the main social problem facing modern times - the lack of freedom and control, leaving little room for creativity.⁵⁹ In her later work Pateman analyses the origins of this 'wagery' in the liberal concept of property in the person.⁶⁰ Many workers are left with little more than small 'resistances' through which to give expression to their desire for control over their lives.⁶¹ A sense of political efficacy is one of the central psychological elements of participation which Pateman is endorsing. It has resonances with Mill's 'active character' and Cole's 'non-servile' character. Industry has a crucial role here. To be self-governing in the workplace helps to foster "a belief that one *can be* self-governing, confidence in one's ability to participate responsibly and effectively, and to

⁵⁸ Nathan Teske, *Political Activists in America: The Identity Construction Model of Political Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 120-1. This study is examined in more detail below

⁵⁹ "When asked what the main problem facing society is, people wrongly answer poverty. The 'fundamental evil', is not poverty but slavery." Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, 34.

⁶⁰ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person." See the following section of this chapter.

⁶¹ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 51-57. Pateman mentions car production workers building-up a 'bank' of work on the line, so that they might have a little time in which to exercise a degree of autonomy. See also Geoff Brown, *Sabotage: A Study in Industrial Conflict* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1977), Martin Sprouse, *Sabotage in the American Workplace: Anecdotes of Dissatisfaction, Mischief, and Revenge* (San Francisco; Balmoral: Pressure Drop Press: AK Press, 1992).

control one's life and environment"⁶² Those most likely to participate in politics, most especially as it now applies, are those with a sense of personal efficacy. Those who have access to effective power structures are confident that they can express themselves in effective ways, the ways that particular institutions require them to, that their voice will be heard and will at least be given some weight in decision making.⁶³ This sense of political efficacy or competence is an operational manifestation of the psychological effects of participation which Pateman is pursuing. She cites the classic Almond and Verba study, *The Civic Culture*, as an important source of evidence for this position.⁶⁴ In this study a sense of political efficacy was positively correlated with political participation, most especially at the local level. This effect was more pronounced in the institutionally advanced democracies where there were more opportunities for participation. Studies by Eliasoph, and by Teske, also provide evidence along similar lines.⁶⁵ Verba, Schlozman and Brady followed up the most persistent correlation in studies of political participation, that of socio-economic status and participation with a sense of efficacy, in their 1995 study *Voice and Equality*⁶⁶. As with Pateman's observation in 1970, Verba et al in 1995 found that an individual's experiences of non-governmental authority structures contribute to a sense of political efficacy.⁶⁷

The more participation in more areas of life that individuals engage in, the higher their scores in political efficacy. This is most particularly true for the high socio-economic status individuals. Not only were they more educated, but of greater significance, they had

⁶² Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 45-46.

⁶³ See Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 304-33.

⁶⁴ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980). Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 47.

⁶⁵ Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Teske, *Political Activists in America*.

⁶⁶ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

⁶⁷ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 330-1. Participatory structures themselves also appear to contribute to overall happiness, see Frey and Stutzer, "Happiness, Economy and Institutions."

more autonomy in their working lives.⁶⁸ The obverse must also be the case, because those most likely not to participate are also more likely to have working lives with little or no scope for initiative, imagination, creativity or autonomy in working practices. Just as a cumulative pattern of participation and a sense of efficacy can develop, so a cumulative pattern of 'apathy' and a low sense of political efficacy will develop.⁶⁹ Pateman observes that "[e]conomic underprivilege is thus linked to *psychological* underprivilege."⁷⁰ A further shade of distinction is highlighted through an examination of different hierarchies of authority in the work place and their effect on self-esteem and sense of efficacy. Different work practices engender different attitudes to participation in social and political activity.⁷¹ Levels of subordination, the multiplicity of points of subordination or by contrast, the extent of genuine interdependent team working and the level of personal control over work, each contribute to individual, personal and political resources. Pateman is throughout this exposition demonstrating the power of the environment to shape and maintain personality structures.⁷² This builds a view of human nature as extremely malleable; even perhaps so far as to be determined by environmental, social, and economic, conditions. Pateman quotes without comment, for instance, Blauner as saying that the "industrial environment tends to breed a distinct social type."⁷³ Left at that, this could be a deeply problematic position, because it indicates a tendency towards such determinism.

⁶⁸ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*.

⁶⁹ Again the theory of learned helplessness is pertinent here. See the initial work by Seligman and Maier, "Failure to Escape Traumatic Shock." J. Garber and M. E. P. Seligman, eds., *Human Helplessness: Theory and Application* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), Christopher Peterson, "Helpless Behavior," *Behavior Research and Theory* 31, no. 3 (1993).

⁷⁰ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 50.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 56., Pateman here makes extensive use of Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁷² Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

⁷³ Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom*, 166. cited in Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 52.

Blauner's observations were, however, made of people in the highly hierarchical environment of work, where they were subject to an enduring and pervasive power structure. There may well be modes of behaviour manifest in the work place, but it would be a mistake to conclude that these people are slaves through and through. This is not to deny that relations to hierarchies at work will not carry over into 'civic attitudes' and a sense of efficacy in public, political arenas. It would also be wrong to suggest, however, that these categories were the whole of the *human* landscape.⁷⁴ It would also be mistaken to suggest that they were indissoluble states of affairs. Throughout *Participation and Democratic Theory* Pateman gives evidence of alternatives and of progressive change. A social sense of political efficacy can be nurtured, quite quickly, in appropriate environments.⁷⁵ This must indicate that these powers are there, immanent in all people. The preceding observations could leave the individuals, the holders and developers of these powers, hanging in the air somewhat.

With her separate but linked observations about control in working life and economic deprivation Pateman both indicates her paradigm site for increased participation and the realms in which the most effective political transformation must be sought. There are also wider themes apparent here, which presage her later work and indicate her concern with the pervasive influence of wider social conditions and political life. These concern a greater inclusivity in a public life of influence and power, and the intimately related one of a more fully realised human existence. Industry now seems an anachronistic term, but work - paid employment - occupies a central, and recently an increasingly substantial, place in our lives.

All human life is activity, but activity differs in its context. Pateman defines 'work', as against leisure - which is largely an occupation of consumption rather than production - quite broadly to include more than the securing of a living. She includes "activities

⁷⁴ Very useful in this regard is the work of Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

⁷⁵ As demonstrated in the empirical evidence presented in chapters 4 & 5 of Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.

that are carried on in co-operation with others, that are 'public' and initially related to the wider society and its (economic) needs; thus we refer to activities that, potentially, involve the individual in decisions about collective affairs, the affairs of the enterprise and of the community."⁷⁶ The psychological effects on participation of the work environment would also be manifest in leisure activity. The personal character created in hierarchies of authority would carry over into leisure time. It would matter very little however much or little leisure time is left, however varied, expensive or cheap it might be to fill. Pateman's theory rests on good practice releasing the unrealised elements of human nature, that structured work and leisure time have not yet fully eliminated.⁷⁷ As Blumberg observes, "a structure of participation ... in the long run becomes more effective because of the eventual compatibility of personality with structure."⁷⁸ In other words, a participatory organisation produces individuals who are responsible participators. This implies that hierarchical systems of authority and work-practices are *incompatible* with human personality, and that *that* personality is grounded in something more enduring than malleable environmental conditions. There is something behind immediate empirical conditions which resist hierarchically coercive power in favour of co-operative, social and interdependent power. There is an internal harmony between person and structure to be found.

Any simplistic notion of providing high-level participatory and decision-making opportunities, and thus expecting people to eagerly grasp them and immediately realise their social self would be misleading and destined to fail. In examining three existing enterprises organised on participatory lines, Pateman showed that existing hierarchies in firms needed to be reflected in available levels of participation, and related decision-making.⁷⁹ In short, there

⁷⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 57-61.

⁷⁸ Paul Blumberg, *Industrial Democracy: The Sociology of Participation* (London: Constable, 1968), 109. cited by Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 67.

⁷⁹ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 82-83, 97.

needs to be levels of 'schooling for democracy'. Where there is more emphasis on top level participation, rank and file members of the enterprise remain absent. This tends to sustain G.D.H. Cole's view that what occurs on the shop floor of enterprises is a "training for subservience".⁸⁰ The environmental aspects of 'education in its widest sense' for participation indicate that it is entirely unrealistic to expect an infant school student to show much interest in, let alone possess a sense of political efficacy, in a university tutorial. Which is not to say they do not possess the immanent capability to gain such efficacy if the opportunity were but to be made available. Indeed in the case of the Yugoslav system of Worker's Councils, Pateman cites some evidence that over time these councils gradually began to take greater and greater advantage of extensive high-level powers contained in the council's rules.⁸¹

The Worker's Councils in Yugoslavia benefited from existing in a communist structure. These structures are now long gone, and all over the world capitalist structures based on neo-liberal institutions and philosophy hold sway. In two recent papers Pateman has offered a further analysis of liberal and libertarian contract theory, and its consequences for our productive forms; in the second she presents a case for universal basic income as a fundamental *democratic* right. For our purposes this would serve two purposes: the functional one of challenging a social, political, and economic system which commodifies human life; while at the same time, liberating a space for human development. The key obstacle to these economic and political developments is the philosophical notion of private property. This is particularly acute when this principle is extended to property in the person, which reduces the metaphysical to the mundane and tradable, the ontological to the epistemological.

⁸⁰ Cole, *World of Labour*.

⁸¹ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 95.

Property in the person & Basic Income

Although private property is owned by an individual person it is separate from them and thus can be removed, given-away, stolen, or rented-out. The same applies where an individual is seen as a self-proprietor, or as having 'property in the person'. During the intense critical discussion of neo-liberal and libertarian ideas in the 1990's, both Cohen and Ingram criticised the concept of self-ownership as a basis for individual autonomy.⁸² Both take self-ownership to be an interchangeable synonym for property in the person. Pateman, while also being critical of libertarianism, and arguing that a freer and democratic society must dispense with the concept of property in the person, nonetheless diverges from Cohen and Ingram on many points.⁸³ Attention will be focused on Pateman's version here, but suffice it to say at this point that both Cohen and Ingram concentrate their efforts rather too much on the problem of exploitation in relationships of alienable and alienated property, where Pateman's concern is with the *subordination* which flows from the concept of alienable property in the person itself.

The nub of Pateman's stance is that by conceiving of human beings as self-owners, as 'owner occupiers'⁸⁴, possessed of exclusive rights of ownership, wagers or the 'traffic in labour power' is enabled.⁸⁵ Property in the person, as including capacities, powers, and rights, once conceived as alienable can, theoretically, lead to self-chosen slavery. Tully notes that if we own our self we have the absolute right to do with ourselves as we wish, including the right to give that

⁸² G.A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality, Studies in Marxism and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Attracta Ingram, *A Political Theory of Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 1994).

⁸³ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

⁸⁴ In Steiner's term; Hillel Steiner, *An Essay on Rights* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

⁸⁵ As we have seen wagers is G.D.H. Cole's term (Cole, *Self-Government in Industry.*), the other is Stanley's; Amy D. Stanley, "Home Life and the Morality of the Market," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Stephen Conway and Melvyn Stokes (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

ownership away.⁸⁶ This includes that element of our self which makes decisions; our reason and will. Van Parijs, however, insists that human beings cannot be conceived of in a way that "allow[s] people to sell themselves into slavery."⁸⁷ Van Parijs accepts the concept of ownership, but the illiberal consequences of the notion force him to put forward a case for what Pateman calls a 'constitutional' view of property in the person. As she argues, "the constitutional view entails that complete alienation, and thus voluntary entry into slavery or absolute monarchy, is blocked."⁸⁸ Political limits on government power, for consent, and political democracy - in sum, political constitutionalism - are thus justified. Economic democracy is ruled-out however, as the economy becomes the realm of the free and 'consensual' trade in the discreet property of 'labour power'.

Pateman claims a third alternative to total alienability is available, that *all* rights over our own person are inalienable. Constitutional alienability is a political fiction, she insists, because we *cannot* alienate discrete elements of our person. We are whole beings, not collections of fragments of property.⁸⁹ Cartesian dualism is destructive of the ontological depth and wholeness of human being:

A worker cannot send along capacities or services by themselves to an employer. The worker has to be present in the workplace if the capacities are to be 'employed', to be put to use... In short, employers hire live persons, not a piece of property. Capitalists become controllers of the productive process and gain the right

⁸⁶ James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81.

⁸⁷ Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 234,n4.

⁸⁸ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

⁸⁹ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 72.

to direct, regulate, and train, the 'repository' of capacities hired.⁹⁰

In similar vein Bhaskar insists that capitalism could not operate without the love which employees bring to the workplace, the commitment to work itself and each other, despite the subordination and exploitation they experience there.⁹¹ The whole human being is present at the workplace, complete with their innate love of humanity, however attenuated by existing social conditions. It follows from this that all employment and wage labour, without workers' control or industrial democracy, is slavery. In the undemocratic workplace our whole being becomes a mere commodity, because the ownership of capital assets gives the capitalist the right of government over others.⁹² For democracy to be progressed the 'right' to self-government in the workplace must be acknowledged.⁹³ This not only demands a change in authority structures, to those based on human worth rather than on ownership of property, but also in 'social provision'.⁹⁴

The aim here is to enable the full and equal standing of all citizens in and out of the 'employment' arena. Equal standing in the welfare state is far too centred on employment as a basic qualifying condition for all manner of rights. Gordon Brown's apparent commitment to 'full employment' for instance, is in fact mainly to full employment opportunity. Those not taking-up that 'opportunity' exclude themselves from any number of benefits. In these conditions employment is not a choice, it is enforced, and thus reconfirms Pateman's idea of 'civil subordination', and Cole's protests against

⁹⁰ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person." See also David P. Ellerman, *Property and Contract in Economics: The Case for Economic Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 19-20.

⁹¹ Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (New Delhi; London: Sage, 2002), 252-54.

⁹² Ellerman, *Property and Contract in Economics*, 17.

⁹³ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

⁹⁴ Ingram, *A Political Theory of Rights*.

'wagery'.⁹⁵ The solution both writers put forward is universal basic income.

Pateman insists that universal basic income should be regarded as of equal importance to democracy as universal suffrage; a fundamental and basic right.⁹⁶ It would remove various impediments to freedom that persist in liberal representative democracy and enable citizens to exercise a full and deep citizenship of equal worth and standing.

In Pateman's analysis, basic income is to be preferred over basic capital or a stake as it would give citizens the freedom *not* to be employed, "it would encourage citizens to reflect on the place of the institution of employment in a democracy... [and help] foster institutional change and uncouple standard of life and citizenship from employment."⁹⁷ It would also encourage a richer and more creative form of human being, because people could take time out of paid employment to do voluntary work which would otherwise not be profitable, develop political interests and abilities, learn to surf, paint, cook, write, or spend time with family or loved ones. The link between marriage, income, and employment would be loosened, and it would "allow individuals more easily to refuse to enter, or to leave relationships that violate individual self-government, or that involve unsafe, unhealthy, or demeaning conditions."⁹⁸ A whole range of humane transformations in social, political, and economic relationships would become possible. In breaking the chains of wagery, general economic dependence, and the profit drive, basic income would also help to transform the relationship of the citizen to the state, away from one of fear of its power, or the cowering respect of the 'very 'umble servant', to that of equal and interdependent solidarity. Individuals and their social, political, and economic institutions could begin to be brought back together. In a

⁹⁵ Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*, Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*.

⁹⁶ Pateman, "Freedom and Democratization."

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

deeper understanding of how the social institutions of marriage, employment, citizenship, and democracy mutually reinforce each other the creative powers and solidary impulses of each citizen could begin to be realised. A universal basic income, unconditionally given as of a right would provide the space for such a transformative process to begin, according to Pateman.

Private into Public 2: A Feminist Break?

In the 1980s and 90s feminism became more and more anti-essentialist and the opportunity to pursue a human ontology as a route to a full female, and male, realisation was all but lost in a storm of anti-reductionist reassessment. Feminists such as Brown, Fraser, and Gatens, criticised Pateman for her essentialist categories of 'woman' and 'man'.⁹⁹ For them a unified woman's politics would be liable to result in a similar exclusionary politics as the traditional liberal appeal to universalism. While such anti-essentialist perspectives have gained much currency, a number of feminists have recently expressed concern about the loss of universally applicable norms.¹⁰⁰ Anti-essentialism's commitment to fragmentary 'radical otherness'¹⁰¹ challenges the very idea of a feminist politics. Worse, it also fails to recognise the importance that appeals to universality have in the struggles of all subordinate groups.¹⁰² Pateman's re-affirmed appeal to universalism echoes those of Nussbaum, Okin and Sen in providing the tools for securing equality for women world

⁹⁹ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (London: Routledge, 1997), Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁰⁰ Boone, *Essentialism as a Grand Unifying Theory*, Marilyn Fry, "The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women," *Signs* 21 (1996), Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*, Luce Irigaray, "Equal to Whom?," in *The Essential Difference*, ed. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

¹⁰¹ See for instance, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*.

¹⁰² Pateman, "Democracy and Democratisation: Presidential Address: XVIth World Congress, IPSA," 10.

wide, but it by no means implies the universalism of liberal social contract.¹⁰³ There is a difference between universal female essentialism and the essentialism of human universals. While Pateman is concerned to make clear the subordination effects on women as women of a patriarchal universalism, her stance is not clearly either that of female essence, nor of rejection of universal essence as such.

When Pateman's work takes a feminist turn, not only are her universalist and essentialist inclinations preserved, but her critique of liberal democracy as it stands continues to be based on the effects of contract theory on democracy. She explicitly states in *The Problem of Political Obligation* that there is no place in democratic theory for the idea of a social contract.¹⁰⁴ In *The Sexual Contract* Pateman argues that the liberal version of the social contract is not a supplementing of the old, pre-democratic, patriarchal order, but that it is a distinctly modern form of patriarchy. The subjection of women to their fathers is exchanged to that of men as men, as members of a fraternal order.¹⁰⁵ This insight is followed through in an examination of marriage and employment contracts, and in contractual relationships in prostitution and surrogacy.¹⁰⁶ Pateman thoroughly exposes the underlying patriarchal power structure of the liberal social contract, based on differentially embodied human subjects. The social contract presupposes and is predicated upon the sexual contract, which is the true origin of political right.¹⁰⁷ As such, any future free and equal participatory society must include some form of differentiated citizenship.¹⁰⁸ Whether this is the final, best possible

¹⁰³ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings.", Susan Moller Okin, "Inequalities between the Sexes in Different Cultural Contexts," in *Women, Culture and Development*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and J. Glover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 178.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 116-42, 54-63, 89-209, 09-18.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 197, Carole Pateman, "Equality, Difference and Subordination: The Politics of Motherhood and Women's Citizenship," in *Beyond Equality &*

conclusion, or a bridging state of affairs is open to question. It is possible to arrive at both conclusions from Pateman's work.

Pateman is greatly concerned with the stories we tell ourselves and each other in order to make sense of the world. Political storytelling helps to create and maintain the conditions - so long as we continue to believe the stories - in which we are governed, what is to count as binding authority and what is legitimate. While this bears some similarity to Mouffe's discursive account of social fabric and change, it is clearly different in that these are *merely stories*, and that in Pateman's account there is a material reality below this fictive surface. The story of the original contract, Pateman insists, tells a modern story of masculine political birth. This story of political birth could be seen as a mundane counter to male uncertainty surrounding questions of paternity. Pateman dismisses such an account.

Mary O'Brien, in a work that obviously made an impact on Pateman, claims that political theory and the resulting organisations are the result of the period of uncertainty between coitus and birth, of the male need "to mediate his alienation from procreation".¹⁰⁹ In relations of power and authority, particularly, but not exclusively in the family, what are created are the institutional forms of the social relations of (re)production. There is, however, no equivalence between political creativity and maternity. Pateman dismisses fatherhood as the power behind creative political activity, because the social meanings of paternity and maternity have never been equivalent. She believes that liberal political story is an example of the *appropriation* by men of the awesome gift that nature has denied them and its transmutation into masculine political creativity. Men give birth she claims, "to an 'artificial' body, the body politic of civil society".¹¹⁰ Women's creativity is thus reduced to the domestic and the reproductive medium through the story or discourse of the sexual

Difference, ed. G Bock and S James (London: Routledge, 1992). See also Ruth Lister, "Dilemmas in Engendering Citizenship," *Economy and Society* 24, no. 1 (1995).

¹⁰⁹ Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 56.

¹¹⁰ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 102.

contract which informs the social contract. If this creativity is not some development of alienated paternity it must be a human capacity which has been elided by masculine social and political forms.¹¹¹ This story has been told and retold in many forms for four hundred years, but recently feminists have begun to tell different stories to articulate the surface in another way.¹¹² Employment and marriage contracts are contracts of domination by means of the contractual fiction that a person's labour, their capacities, powers, and services are separable from the individual in which they reside and from which they derive.¹¹³ Pateman moves us towards a vision of freedom which rejects the separation of embodied capacities and powers, which can freely admit the differently embodied individualities of men and women, by grasping the unitary, non-duality in Bhaskar's language, of the human subject, society, and being.

The sexual contract has no place in democratic theory, but to ignore it is to fail to construct a democratic theory of any value at all. Democracy must be for all human beings. Following the liberal replacement of paternal rule, the rule of the father politically embodied in the King, with rule by the sons, women became politically problematic. They were no longer, metaphorically, children held in the confines of the family by the authority of a father. They were siblings but the new liberal order was fraternal. Women had become a disorderly political presence which the social/sexual contract helps to contain. Pateman's outstanding contribution has been to show how this containment operates and how obstinately resistant it is to transformation. She rejects liberal universalism as false because it excludes women. For Pateman, this is not merely an accidental historical oversight which modern

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹¹² Susan Hekman, "Backgrounds and Riverbeds: Feminist Reflections," *Feminist Studies* Summer (1999). Donna J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, New ed. (London: Verso, 1992), Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Re-Invention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991).

¹¹³ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 72.

sensibilities and the extension of liberal rights can easily redress. It is, rather, a constitutive philosophical ground to the structures and culture of liberal social, political, and economic institutions. Each advance in the inclusion of women into modern citizenship, for example suffrage, equal employment rights, has been accommodated by the patriarchal division without altering its underlying structure.¹¹⁴ Liberalism is not the only theoretical tradition which is criticised on these terms. Pateman is disappointed by theorists of radical democracy's blindness to this issue. She even includes her own early work in this, particularly her valorisation of Rousseau as the exemplar of a participatory democratic theorist.¹¹⁵

Pateman is claiming that *all* these forms of contract theory are faulty because they reify one moment, or absurdly exaggerate implicit or implied actions, into an all-time state of affairs which in effect constitutes a self-assumed obligation to slavery. Pateman's pessimism here is at odds with elements of her conclusion. There is, I believe, the basis in Pateman's work to argue that the sexual contract is a self-assumed obligation by both men and women, that is absurd and faulty, that can only be addressed and remedied through a participatory democracy in a democratic participatory society.

Different or differentiated?

The essential innateness of the differences which the sexual contract manifest are certainly debatable. While Pateman has been accused of some of the less progressive consequences of essentialism, this is a caricature of her position.¹¹⁶ There are differences, in and between the sexes, that is undeniable. Some of these may be biological and, relatively, fixed. Some of them may also contribute positively to human being as a whole. Pateman's thesis is that we

¹¹⁴ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*.

¹¹⁵ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 6.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*, Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*.

must withhold our opinion on these questions while patriarchal and liberal concepts condition the nature of our material and political existence. Certainly, for women democracy has never existed, because "women have never been and still are not admitted as full and equal members and citizens in any country known as a 'democracy'."¹¹⁷ If taken seriously and brought in from the margins of political theory feminism can provide democracy not only with its most important critique and challenge, but also with important insights. To persist in believing that women are the civil and political equals of men is to ignore the existence of social practices which give expression to widespread and deeply held convictions which contradict this purported civil equality of the sexes. The lion-skin of political citizenship does not fit at all well and social inequalities are most certainly relevant to political equality.¹¹⁸ Only crude liberal theory attempts to disagree with this last point, but radical critics of liberalism and advocates of participatory democracy are also complicit in the failure of democratic theory and practice to include women as equals.¹¹⁹ They have rarely examined the significance of sexually based inequality, as they have done for the role of economic and class based inequality and its significance for the democratic transformation of liberalism. They implicitly argue as if 'individuals' and 'citizens' are men. Women have been systematically marginalized or even written-out of democratic political life.

That there are differences in civil standing between the sexes is not difficult to see. Anti-democrats and anti-feminists glibly account for these differences through appeal to *natural* differences between the sexes. Women are *of nature*, they do not possess the rational capacity for public life, being ruled by the passions not reason as men are. They are suited by nature to the private domestic sphere of nurture and service. Men are 'abler and stronger' and naturally

¹¹⁷ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 210.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. For the origin of 'the lion-skin' see Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975 [1843]), 220-21.

¹¹⁹ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 210-11, 20-21.

prevail over women.¹²⁰ Women are 'naturally' taken to be born to subordination in liberal theory, but are also taken to somehow consent to the domestic realm, as their 'natural' role.¹²¹ How can one *choose* to act in accord to one's nature? This contradiction and paradox remains at the heart of democratic theory and practice. Pateman archly places 'natural' in single quotes. She obviously disagrees about the natural, fixed inevitability of these roles and attitudes. Far from being pre-given characteristics they are "specific formulations in different historical epochs", they are not essential parts of the human condition.¹²² There is a particular construction here which serves to hide the patriarchal structure of liberalism. As these specific formulations are historically structured 'natures' they are re-constructible against more just, free, and equal ideals. Pateman's plea is for the recognition and admission of these problems into democratic theory, that this reconstruction might begin. It cannot possibly be known, she insists, if men and women are by nature different. The social world, and as a consequence its political institutions and structures, are immersed in the peculiar fictions of 'natural' roles and capacities which serve the particular political realm of liberalism and capitalism. Pateman employs J.S. Mill's insights here, while at the same time despairing at his conclusions,¹²³ to show that we can know nothing about the respective natures of man and woman, because we have only known the sexes in unequal relationship.¹²⁴ Any such differences will become known only when the sexes can finally interact as equal and independent rational beings; and only then.

¹²⁰ John Locke and Peter Laslett, *Two Treatises of Government: A Critical Edition*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1967, 1967), 1, 47, 48: II, 82. cited in Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 213.

¹²¹ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 213.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 214-17.

¹²⁴ Mill and Fawcett, *On Liberty*.

Concluding comments

Despite claiming that, as yet, we know nothing about differences in human nature between the sexes, Pateman nonetheless consistently reaffirms a number of commitments: men and women possess the capacities for independent and rational thought and action; these capacities are nurtured or blocked by social and political structures, which it is in our compass to re-construct more effectively along empowering lines.¹²⁵ She also implies that present assumed difference in moral and other capacities are only that, ascribed and assumed. On the face of it this picture is less clear when she talks of the need for differentiated citizenship. Liberalism remains the problem, but even those theorists critical of liberalism have reproduced the problem because they have persisted in holding to contract versions of social and political life.

What is common in these various contract theories is an exclusionary focus on power, on individual desires to have power *over* another. For the abstract individual, cut adrift from all social, communal moorings, with nothing to focus on but their own desires, and potential threats to their property, this is inevitable. A divisive philosophy of *duality*, of mind/body, master/slave, of reified property in the person, will ensure conflict and inequality continue to be reproduced, in relationships, families, and workplaces. Differences will be emphasised and exacerbated, separating us one from the other even though we rely and are interdependent upon the goodwill, and love, of each other.¹²⁶ A critical realist analysis indicates that until the creative use of power, socially and interdependently, is adequately theorised to reconnect the social with the political, the divisions on gender and class lines articulated by Pateman can only continue to be reproduced.

¹²⁵ Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 221-22.

¹²⁶ Archer, *Being Human*, 307, Roy Bhaskar, *Meta-Reality: Creativity, Love and Freedom*, vol. 1, *The Bhaskar Series. The Philosophy of Meta-Reality* (New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 2002), 167-71.

The development of Pateman's work through its feminist phase may seem, on the face of it, to present a grim, totalised, and closed system, where such a *non-dual* resolution is unlikely. Every progressive movement towards women's free and equal inclusion in the democratic realm has thus far remained within the terms of the sexual contract. Pateman, however, cannot help but express a cautious optimism, that:

the political landscape has changed substantially over the last two decades. The story of the original contract must now be told in a less hospitable political context. Patriarchal structures and divisions are no longer as solid as they were between, say, the 1867 Reform Act and the turmoil of 1968.¹²⁷

Democratic control of that most essential base of human being, productive work, not just employment, offers a deeply effecting source of human progress. Together with universal basic income, to create a zone of possibility between the interconnected spheres of actualised social mechanisms, and positive human emergent powers, such a programme of democratic deepening could offer both the sexes the chance to discover mutual human similarities and enriching differences. For such an outcome to come to pass, a thoroughgoing engagement with ontology, to offer the possibility of a 'thick' conceptualisation of human nature, is crucial.

¹²⁷ Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 233.

Chapter 7 - Chantal Mouffe

In developing her theory of radical democracy Chantal Mouffe consistently rails against essentialism and calls for a new ontology based around the concepts of individualism, value pluralism, and commitment to liberty in its negative form, to respect the diverse identities of a radically shifting social and political world. In particular, all previous versions of marxism are critiqued as inadequate. In Mouffe's view, the description of, and progressive democratic change to, the world have been ill-served by all theories which rely on elements of essentialism. Entirely novel social conditions now exist following the upheavals of post-Fordism, post-communism, and technological change, which demand a thoroughgoing reconfiguration of our approaches to democratic theory. Despite her consistent warnings, however, about the dangers of essentialism I will show that there is nonetheless an essential, unchanging foundation on which her theory rests. The underpinning characteristics embedded in her theory can only be seen as an implicit human nature. However, because Mouffe rejects essentialism out of hand, one-dimensionally misanthropic, theoretically thin, and behaviourist characteristics remain implicit in her theory. In bringing them under a critical light their implications will here be contrasted against Mouffe's radical democratic project.

I begin by showing that when Mouffe seeks to expose the damage essentialism has wrought on marxism, she actually falls into an essentialism herself. I argue in this first section that essentialism is implicit in aspects of Mouffe's theory. Indeed, her theory is suffused with the essential categories of identity and agonism, and the need for what she calls the 'democratic imaginary' in some form of community. This idea of community is examined in the second section, where Mouffe's articulation of a concept similar to Dewey's

'democratic faith' and Barber's 'moral security', is examined.¹ Although these 'pragmatic sceptics' of participatory democracy theory all share a commitment to a pluralistic diversity, and a scepticism towards essence, they also need some form of bond to hold together the conflicting impulses of their pluralism into a democratic community. Communitarianism is notoriously conservative, and Mouffe's version of community ironically invites similar concerns. An important element of this concern is the 'positivistic idealism' which is present in her theory. Such an idealism, divorced from material reality, flows undeniably from her participatory democracy in a number of ways. These flaws are pursued in an examination of Mouffe's account of society and of social change, which have some parallels to critical realism. Although firmly committed to a post-structuralist world-view, I will show that the intersecting planes of - what critical realism would call - social, agential, and culturally emergent properties discernable in Mouffe's theory begin to develop a nuanced and striking account of social change. However, because of the isolationist individualism of her 'agonistic' view of human relations, Mouffe is unable to adequately account for the possibility of a democratic community. In addition, the emergence of emancipatory or directed forms of resistance are rendered problematic by her rejection of all talk of human essence. These problems are exacerbated through the development of the additional and related concepts of articulation and mediation. The advantage of mediation, over Mouffe's commitment to articulation, of the apparently fragmented elements of contemporary reality is then advanced.

Essentialism redivivus

Mouffe's novel ontology involves "privileging the moment of political activation"², and the central category of this new view of

¹ See chapters 2 and 5.

² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), x. (Henceforth HSS)

politics is hegemony. Mouffe claims it no longer makes sense to privilege any particular field or agent of politics, especially as represented in the economic/class analysis of Marxism.³ Hegemony is the process by which consensus is engineered or constructed, through dominance of the content of cultural forms. Mouffe foresees a new hegemony, and believes that the only field of conflict remaining, where that hegemony can begin, is that of culture and discourse. The economic realm particularly is not perceived by her as a primary realm of identity or action, and thus cannot hold any privileged role in bringing about the new hegemony. This is a representative moment of the shift in ontological categories of Mouffe's implicit human nature. The Marxist concept of humanity as *homo faber* is redundant, and makes way for liberal, individualist, identity politics. Mouffe is engaged throughout her work in outlining a strategy for participatory democracy which, while dispensing with much of Marxism, remains radical. The ground for this is challenging liberalism to finally live-up to its promise to deliver individual, pluralist freedoms. In the 2001 preface to the second edition of *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy*, for instance, Laclau and Mouffe claim that their theoretical perspective has proved, in the fifteen years between editions, to be a far more adequate tool than others which have attempted to inform discussion of subjectivity, democracy and globalisation.⁴ Marxism, and the deliberative theorisations of Rawls, Habermas and their various followers, and the various manifestations of the 'Third Way', or 'Neue Mitte' are the targets of this claim.

In *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy* Mouffe claims that the many antagonisms of contemporary societies belong to a field of

³ *Ibid.*, 152, 56. In their post-HSS work, Laclau and Mouffe have followed different paths, with Mouffe developing the theory of radical democracy. Laclau has made it clear that the theory of radical democracy is largely Mouffe's, see Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolutions of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 180. Laclau refers specifically to the final chapter of HSS, as being Mouffe's work. Wenman has developed this point to convincingly separate the work of Laclau & Mouffe; Mark Wenman, "Laclau & Mouffe: Splitting the Difference," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* (2003).

⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, vii.

discursivity beyond the materialist grasp of Marxist theory.⁵ She depicts contemporary society as consisting of two realms which are not compatible; the political (discursive) and the economic (determinist) realms, in which the all-encompassing realm of political discursive action takes precedence over the economic. There is a very pragmatic cast to this formulation, concentrating as it does on action as the core element of democratic practice. Agonism is 'the political', into which the economic is un-problematically absorbed as a secondary constitutive form of activity.⁶ Not only is agonistic action the very basis for the possibility of democracy itself, it follows that it is also the justification for participatory democracy, or what Mouffe calls 'radical democracy'. The extending of current democratic boundaries into deeper and deeper areas of society where these differences can be brought to the light, and negotiated between is at the heart of Mouffe's vision of 'radical democracy'.⁷ As such it clearly comes within the grasp of participatory democracy, despite the relative under-playing of economic democracy.⁸ This downplaying of the economic and the materially productive is of course a consequence of Mouffe's particular ontology and subsequent thin concept of human nature. Contingency is the fundamental category upon which her theory builds. Irreconcilable difference or otherness is the ontological essence of Mouffe's universe.

Hegemony & Socialist Strategy begins from the premise that the link between the economic and the political has been broken, or

⁵ Ibid., ix.

⁶ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 101, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 2-3. See Wolin on 'politics' and 'the political'. For Wolin, however, 'the political' is episodic and rare, with occasional outbreaks of political democracy. Wolin, "'Fugitive Democracy'."

⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2, 152ff.

⁸ Economic or industrial democracy is generally seen as a fundamental element of participatory democracy; see Held, *Models of Democracy*, 264-71. See also the Port Huron Statement in Appendix A. Mouffe is, however, comfortable with being included in a theoretical tradition which includes Mill, Dewey, Pateman, and Barber; "I feel close to participatory democracy on many aspects but I also have criticisms of some of its versions." Private correspondence. C. Mouffe, email, 30th June 2003.

shown to be false.⁹ Marxists have continually struggled with this separation, fatal to their apparent basic tenets. The working class are getting richer, and the economic base is no longer capable of assuring a unified class agent of social progress. Mouffe claims that hegemony is the discursive surface representation of a fundamental logic of social relations at odds with basic Marxist categories.¹⁰ To this end, with Laclau, she sets about examining the history of marxist thought after Marx, for examples of this failure of the fundamental categories of Marxism. Through discussion of Luxemburg's spontaneism, they identify the 'crisis of Marxism', and then proceed to examine three responses: the orthodoxy of Kautsky and Plekhanov, Bernstein's revisionism, and Sorel's revolutionary syndicalism. Each of these responses moves towards 'the logic of contingency', as they all face the apparent failure of 'historical necessity' as an explanatory category. In each case they bounce back on themselves due, in Mouffe's analysis, to an attachment to universal Marxist categories.

The basis of Luxemburg's spontaneism is, she claims, a discursive not a material phenomenon. The unity of the working class is merely a symbolic unity in that every political mobilization confronts its actors as a moment in which their consciousness as an historical force is given active and practical form over its previous theoretical status.¹¹ In Luxembourg's Marxist theory this active, practical, historic status is latent in the very being of the working class. Mouffe perceives a problem in the mutual antagonism of this contingent unity of the working class, of which she approves, and the 'necessary' progress of capitalism towards its own crisis and replacement. This latter is a solidified and closed account which allows for no contingent variation. The symbolic nature of the spontaneous unity of class, however, can re-define itself pragmatically as required by contingent events.¹² These two

⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

explanatory principles cannot positively merge because, contrary to Luxemburg's desire, they are not discretely valid explanatory principles in their own complimentary realms, the political and the economic, but rather they are the negative opposites of each other.

Mouffe presents a stark choice where either economic necessity will lead to a unified working class by itself, or there will be contingent fragmentation. There is, however, no need to allow ourselves to be forced into Mouffe's stark rhetorical position. Despite the wide diversity of experiences and responses to social life, a common structural situation of exploitation with some common features can be discerned, such as the lack of autonomy or interest at work, the irksome, and the frustrating drudgery of much paid employment. Indeed some pervasive economic tendencies which create precarious living and working conditions could form "a solid, objective basis ... for a unifying socialist politics", if only Mouffe's strategy of argumentation had not precluded it.¹³ The protest of Geras, that Laclau and Mouffe fantastically simplify the work of Luxemburg, seems justified. What they present us with is a 'a manifest deformation'¹⁴, an over-emphasis on the symbolic which reduces the complexity of political and economic causality to the interplay of meanings alone.¹⁵ What remains is a flat, unstratified social ontology, with no levels of reality. They leave us with a social world consisting in a number of intersecting surfaces of infinite diversity where a plurality of identities create and recreate themselves through the resource of symbol and language. This is, it must be allowed, a densely complex and revealingly descriptive account of social reality, but it remains very close to the 'actual', empirical surface of contemporary events. While new times, particularly new knowledges, will produce the need for new fields of research, the historical accumulation of knowledge and social practices will also produce a third dimension to social reality. In addition to a densely complex surface, the advance of time will leave

¹³ N. Geras, "Post-Marxism," *New Left Review*, no. 163 (1987): 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

behind it an inheritance of persisting social, cultural, political, and economic structures. The enduring effects of these structural inheritances are underplayed in Mouffe's theory.

Just as Barber observes the limiting, and indeed perverting, consequences of foundational principles, so Mouffe decries the "[Luxemburg's] discourse [which] also functions in another important direction as a limitation of the political conclusions capable of being derived from the 'observable tendencies' in advanced capitalism."¹⁶ These tendencies will not only be observable but 'really' effective. Luxemburg, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Bernstein, and Sorel are all accused of being unable to deconstruct and move on, as Mouffe has managed. They simply reproduce in different ways the crisis of marxism. They merely "elaborate intellectually the observable tendencies of fragmentation and dispersion" produced by capital.¹⁷ The task required of political and social theory for Mouffe is to "ensure that such tendencies have a transitory character" on the road of transition to a socialist society.¹⁸ Mouffe is not in the business of resolving the fragmentation and dispersion though, because in her universe, despite the criticism that previous marxisms have merely intellectually elaborated these tendencies, they are the very stuff of the universe. They cannot be made whole or strengthened.

The Marxist orthodoxy of Kautsky and of Plekhanov is one response to this crisis, the revisionism of Bernstein and the Revolutionary Syndicalism of Sorel are further responses. Each of these are condemned by Mouffe because they insist on holding to Marxist foundations of the economic determination of the identity of a universal historical class agent. A growing recognition of this problem of determinist foundationalism has nonetheless led to various developments of the concept of hegemony. In using the deconstructionist maps drawn by Derrida, Heidegger and

¹⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Wittgenstein, Mouffe sets out on a journey away from class to account for the modern condition of radical contingency.¹⁹ In some respects, if class was ever really the sociological category that Mouffe seems to assume it was, rather than an analytical term for master/slave relations, this need not be a problem. It could lead us to the emancipatory insight of a transit towards a goal, towards all humanity.

The struggle in Mouffe's system is, however, goalless, in part because hegemony is a theory of "decision taken in an undecidable terrain."²⁰ Where previously structural determination was taken to prevail, Mouffe argues that hegemonic articulations can only be contingent.²¹ They are acts of political institution that find their source and motivation nowhere but in themselves. Transitions in social history (not progress, necessarily) are fully dependent on political articulations and not on entities constituted outside the political field, such as 'class interests'. Indeed, "politico-hegemonic articulations retroactively create the interests they claim to represent."²² Class therefore is not real, but a post hoc creation of political activity and the act of thinking the identity 'class'. Dispensing with class would seem to pull Mouffe into the camp of the 'Third Way'. The fragmenting of power relations into a plurality of discursive planes in search of a new radical and plural democracy are consonant with Blair's dispensing with determinist categories such as 'left' and 'right' in his occupation of the 'radical centre'. Mouffe objects to this charge by calling on the irredeemably conflictual nature of human beings, against the third way's insistence on the possibility of consensus.²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 151, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 9. See also Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (London: Verso, 1986).

²⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xi. A term they acquire from the work of Derrida.

²¹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 10-11, 114.

²² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xi.

²³ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 110, 14, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 150-53, Chantal Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999).

The 'Third Way', in abandoning the friend-enemy dichotomy has, she claims, also abandoned the capacity to perceive the structure of power relations in society.²⁴ This has the consequence of creating an inability to imagine the possibility of a new political/economic order. It fixes the political landscape into a hegemony, with the ideological baggage and post hoc justifications for claiming that 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA).²⁵ In relinquishing the concept of left-right in their language, social democratic parties of the third way have also dispensed with their anti-capitalist critique.²⁶ The modern discourse of the third way lacks reference to any alternative order to the present neo-liberal hegemony, which is accepted as the only feasible discourse at the end of history. As Laclau and Mouffe make clear, globalisation is a given and cannot be opposed by any existing or possible political force:

This argument takes for granted the ideological terrain which has been created as a result of years of neo-liberal hegemony, and transforms what is a conjunctural state of affairs into a historical necessity. Presented as driven exclusively by the information revolution, the forces of globalisation are detached from their political dimensions and appear as a fate to which we all have to submit. So we are told that there are no more left-wing or right-wing economic policies, only good or bad ones!²⁷

Mouffe claims, however, that to picture the world of politics through the lens of hegemonic relations is to break free of such an illusion. The globalised political scene, seen through the lens of hegemonic relations, is merely "the expression of a certain configuration of

²⁴ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 111, Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*. See Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Malden, Mass. ; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

²⁵ After Margaret Thatcher's, 'There is no alternative', phrase. See Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 116.

²⁶ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 109.

²⁷ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xvi. See also, Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 108-28.

power relations."²⁸ For Mouffe this configuration is of course one of discourse. Particular social forces have transformed the relations between capital and nation-states, through discourse, by redrawing political frontiers. Given this, new political frontiers, claims Mouffe, can also be drawn. The neo-liberal hegemony, however, is surely a real manifestation of real practices, with its own logic served by economic powers and, as has been seen with Barber's work, a deep philosophical basis to its articulation.

Mouffe insists, however, that the basic precondition for the possibility of hegemony at all is "structured undecidability".²⁹ If society were indeed governed by internal laws which presided over whatever structural arrangements could exist there would be no space for change in either the short-term or in the long-run transformation from one hegemony or ideology to another.³⁰ In fact politics as an autonomous activity would be impossible. Any particular ideological form must be composed of elements whose own nature is not predetermined, but which can, via discursive articulation, nevertheless coalesce into a larger cohering form, a hegemony. This is undeniable, because society is an open structure and things do coalesce in new and creative ways. The all-pervasive character of capital, as a central aspect of the current ideology, as an external, articulating practice, must be considered a powerful force in this discursive landscape. It is surely also the case, however, that an 'articulating practice' could be internal, such as human nature, the need for food, love, recognition, security, which are all articulating practices of human, social being. Caroline New calls Mouffe's schema a 'periodisation' thesis.³¹ It emphasises, and proceeds from the particularities of the current political state, of the particularities of one period, of globalisation, the information rich and information poor, etc. It is actually a realist analysis, in so

²⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xvi.

²⁹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 21-22, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 141.

³⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xii.

³¹ Caroline New, *Agency, Health & Survival: The Ecopolitics of Rival Psychologies* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 5.

far as it recognises 'real' social phenomena that have 'real' effects. This is implicitly combined with an essentially universalist ethical rejection of domination, which is a valorisation of autonomy, self-determination, tolerance and diversity, all to be articulated in an intense, civic republican activity.³²

In any particular ideological period human subjectivity will have, claims Mouffe, a universalistic dimension, "but it is a very particular type of universalism whose main features it is important to point out."³³ It is difficult to discover what this might be, because Mouffe merely offers what it is not. For instance, it is not a social contract, because it transforms the identity of its subjects, nor is it linked to public space like an Hegelian universal class, as it begins at the level of civil society. It is also not a universal proletarian class, because it does not result in "an ultimate human reconciliation leading to the withering of the state and the end of politics."³⁴ Instead she asserts that "the hegemonic link is, on the contrary, constitutively political."³⁵ It is the consequence of a dialectical relationship between "the logics of difference and the logics of equivalence."³⁶ In other words, society is essentially made up of discourses, within which social actors occupy different, separated identities. There will however be groups of social actors who share a common source of oppression or obstacles to their negative liberty, and the contradiction between individual differences and the pull of community provide the dialectical tension of democratic politics.³⁷

There are essentially two fundamental themes emerging from Mouffe's theory at this point; the antagonistic nature of social actors, and the very particular form of political community she is beginning to outline. The latter will be explored further below.

³² Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 24-25, 38, 62-63.

³³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 97.

³⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xiii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 108, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 71.

Suffice it to note for now, however, that irreducible contestability is the universal norm. Politics is the process of struggle, contestation, and debate over disputed ideas, products, resources, and ends. This is Mouffe's ontological form, political contestation, here called discursive agonism. There is no cunning of reason to be realised in agonism, nor a system of rules by which agonism can be tamed and ordered.³⁸ Mouffe does however seek to provide us with some descriptive tools by which we can observe and picture society, the better to direct discourse towards her preferred, and particularly socialist, hegemony.

In a universe of essential contestability it seems odd to prefer one hegemonic manifestation over any other. Mouffe's radicalisation of democracy would take place on a terrain of power which itself would be transformed along with the contested identities of its citizens. The tension between the constant struggle to assert personal difference, but also to belong to a community of particular social practices or identities, will produce a plurality of allegiance which may coalesce into temporary ideologies. In such a world of value and identity plurality liberal democracy is "not the enemy to be destroyed, ...in order to create a new society."³⁹ The underpinning values of liberty and equality for all are not the problem so much as the system of power that liberal democracy maintains which limits and redefines those values. This would put Mouffe firmly against private property and the capitalism which commodifies everything, which are after all essential to the system of power which distorts those fundamental values. Nothing as material as property, however, is allowed any privileged position in the discussion of the constitution of identity or difference in Mouffe's work. She wishes to see a deepening of democracy, through radical and plural democracy, extending liberty and equality further into more aspects of social

³⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xiv.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xv, Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 2.

relations that the plurality of shifting identity and unfixity of 'the good life' or lives might prosper.⁴⁰

This picture is, however, complicated by Mouffe when she claims there is an irreconcilable tension between the traditions and principles of ancient and of modern democracy.⁴¹ The principle of equality and popular sovereignty of ancient democracy have been overshadowed by the rise (and supposed) triumph of the new "symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, with its emphasis on the value of individual liberty and human rights."⁴² The result is "a constitutive tension between the corresponding 'grammars'" of liberty and equality.⁴³ This paradox can only be negotiated, not resolved. Mouffe is deeply influenced in this by Schmitt who argues that "liberalism negates democracy and democracy negates liberalism."⁴⁴ Schmitt of course articulated such a tension with a defence of a very particular form of state and politics in mind.⁴⁵ Political activity in the pursuit of the realisation of any particular ideological project alludes to an absent but desired totality. In political struggle or democratic activity we seek to recompose and rearticulate the existing elements of social, political, and economic reality to overcome this absence. In doing so this attempted hegemonic realisation, of filling or overcoming the fissures in the social geology, makes "it possible for struggles to be given a meaning, and for historical forces to be endowed with full positivity."⁴⁶ Hegemony will not be the majestic unfolding of either social or individual identity, but the response, in recomposition and rearticulation, to crises. Mouffe's participatory democratic theory

⁴⁰ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 103.

⁴¹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 2-3, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 105, 40, Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*.

⁴² Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵ Mark Neocleous, "Friend or Enemy? Reading Schmitt Politically," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 79 (1996).

⁴⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 7.

involves a constant reactionary development of civic republican activity, to fill the threatening void of non-identity.

Political activity is distilled down to the clash of competing ideologies, of opposed sets of ideas, which are in continuous struggle for dominance. All of reality becomes merely our symbolic descriptions of it, where the existence of material reality or material relations within that reality are, at the most, secondary to our descriptive articulations.⁴⁷ This is not to deride the power of ideas to set in motion great forces of history. Mouffe's formulation, however, has two separate tendencies which underplay the complex depth of human reality. The one-dimensional negativity of her conception, of what will be described as human motivation, is misleading. Secondly, the lack of attention to material reality tends to 'empty-out' her conception of politics. It is limited to a discourse of inscription into social and cultural practice or symbol. In dispensing with the primacy of the structures of class and the economic she ends up giving the principal position to ideology, where human social and political activity is reduced to the hegemonic articulation of partial ideological perspectives.⁴⁸ She leaves us with a post-Marxism which is really a non-Marxism, if not an anti-Marxism.⁴⁹ This also inevitably empties-out her conception of human being. In effect she is unable to factor-in, not only our biological/physical being, but also our spiritual, philosophical ontological being. In denying the possibility of pursuing particular emancipatory paths against particular structural ills, Mouffe dilutes those agents and ills in "an indeterminate 'stew'"⁵⁰ of bourgeois democracy, and to bourgeois individuals lumped together into 'people'.⁵¹ The material, physical and biological embodiment of human being is not entirely denied. It is, however, in

⁴⁷ Jonathan Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*, *Routledge Studies in Critical Realism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 25.

⁴⁸ Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism*, 49-59.

⁴⁹ N. Geras, "Ex-Marxism without Substance - Being a Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe," *New Left Review*, no. 169 (1988), Geras, "Post-Marxism."

⁵⁰ Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism*, 59.

⁵¹ Geras, "Ex-Marxism without Substance - Being a Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe."

'reality' irrelevant compared to our ability to describe and re-describe our existence in an infinity of powerful discursive identities.

Community

A number of commentators have claimed that communitarianism is a politically conservative strand of thought.⁵² For her part, Mouffe accepts many of the criticisms which communitarians make of the classical liberal concept of abstract individualism, but she is also critical of those aspects of communitarianism which attempt to reconstruct the vanished glory of 'pre-modern' forms of community. Substantive notions of the common good based on shared moral values, or an organic, holistic conception of society are, she insists, incompatible with, and inadequate for, modern democracy.⁵³ They may also amount to 'totalitarian' attempts to impose a rigid 'consensus' on individuals and groups which does not allow for the plurality and diversity vital to radical democracy in modern societies.⁵⁴

As well as this strong form of communitarianism, however, there is a moderate form which does not completely reject all liberal ideals and values, and recognises the importance of individuality, freedom, and rights. This form also holds that these values must, nevertheless, be embedded in the historically given traditions of particular communities, societies or cultures.⁵⁵ It is clear that Mouffe places

⁵²For the claim that 'communitarianism' in general is 'conservative' in its political orientation see Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit, "Introduction," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4, 9-10.; Amy Gutmann, "Communitarian Criticisms of Liberalism," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 121.; Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), ix-x, 84.

⁵³ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 97, 112, 22.

⁵⁴ See her criticisms of 'New Labour' and 'Third Way' politics in Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 108-28. See also Chantal Mouffe, "New Labour, New Language?," *Political Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2000).

⁵⁵ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 30-32, 64-65, 71.

herself in this former, moderate, strand of communitarianism. The common good and civic virtue are, she allows, important and relevant concerns, but they must be raised in a "modern fashion".⁵⁶ Communitarian critiques of individualism need not necessarily entail the abandonment of either rights or of pluralism. Mouffe believes there is room enough on the train to radical democracy for conservative critics of modern individualism too. They could share some mutual space, without them "having to renounce their cherished values of tradition and belonging."⁵⁷ By the same token it would appear that radical democrats should be quite comfortable with the 'cherished values of tradition and belonging'. In both Hegel and Oakeshott Mouffe finds a "useful" communitarian critique of liberalism which refuses to abandon "all normative aspects to the sphere of private morality", but which nevertheless permit "the recognition of pluralism and individual liberty" in civil association or *societas*.⁵⁸

Individual identity is, for Mouffe, an effect of discourse, not a prior condition.⁵⁹ The dissolving of identity into practice is often seen as a contrivance or consequence of patriarchal political power.⁶⁰ For male theorists, and male citizens, such identity questions could easily be ignored or dissolved into 'human identity' because civic identity is a concern which is never an issue.⁶¹ Pateman, especially, insists that such dissolution of identities is used to construct and preserve patriarchal institutions whilst also denying to the politically and economically marginalized, any meaningful inclusion.⁶² A

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁸ Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 175, 318., quoted in, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 68. see also 16.

⁵⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 179, Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 5, 60-77, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, principally 75-76. 17, 115, 97.

⁶⁰ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 13, Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 102.

⁶¹ Nancy Hartsock 'Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?' in L. Nicholson (Ed) *Feminism/Postmodernism*. London. Routledge. 1990. 157-175. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*. Iris M. Young *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

⁶² Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 6.

redefinition of citizenship and the public sphere to include such 'real' invisible identities is what is needed, to broaden democracy to a social practice including all social identities. Mouffe, however, sees this as preserving fixed essentialist notions of identity, with romantic or rigid pre-given states closed to reconstruction in the political realm.⁶³ Radical citizenship in a radical democracy would reform identities through the process of articulation of a collective political identity in a democracy of equivalence, a *societas* of a common bond.⁶⁴

Thus Mouffe preserves an idea of political community based on an ethical bond, even though her understanding of this 'community' has been disengaged from any single, homogenous, "substantive common good".⁶⁵ She does concede that Oakeshott is a conservative political thinker, but insists that an emphasis on the importance of 'historical tradition', is not necessarily associated with a conservative approach to politics which rejects pluralism.⁶⁶ Despite her protestations, Mouffe shares much of the philosophical space of fundamentally 'conservative' political thought. It must also be observed that Mouffe insists that what contemporary politics needs is not a complete rejection of universalism in favour of particularism, but, rather a "new type of articulation between the universal and the particular".⁶⁷ The 'universal' she wants to keep seems to be a commitment to the 'democratic imaginary', the ethical commitment to a *societas* of common bond where each and every citizen's right to rearticulation is respected in a community of democratic equivalence. She argues that there is no need to fall into the "view that denies the universal human dimension of the individual".⁶⁸ Participatory democracy must re-emphasise particularism without adopting a "pure particularism" which is little more than "another

⁶³ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 81-88.

⁶⁴ Mouffe employs Oakeshott's phrase. *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68, 15-16, 47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

form of essentialism".⁶⁹ This is, however, a view which is based on principles which are logically inconsistent with almost all Mouffe says about the political project associated with post-structural post-Marxism. In this balancing act her theory constantly topples over into particularism.

Mouffe has a distinctly idealist angle on the formation of political community, and her development of the idea of a democratic community moves to hegemonic ideology via the concrete phenomena of New Social Movement (hereafter NSM) theory. This progress proceeds from Mouffe's modest acknowledgement of a material element of ideology.⁷⁰ In her drive, however, to abandon the old essentialisms of 'economic reductionism' and its class agents, this material nature of ideology becomes limited to a kind of 'post-hoc' materiality.⁷¹ Although ideological discourse is displayed on the material body of society, it is most definitely not the artefact of material social and economic relations themselves. Political activity sheared from its material social and economic base becomes a lifestyle choice, a garment. The political agent of radical democracy becomes the weekend activist of the diaspora of New Social Movements. In emphasising the inevitability and utility of agonistic identity politics of a "multiplicity of subject positions which constitute a single agent",⁷² Mouffe has absorbed a body of sociological theory which, at one and the same time was itself only fleetingly appropriate and which was also quite incompatible with the theoretical tools she has used to appropriate it.⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

⁷¹ Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*, 109.

⁷² Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 12.

⁷³ Barbara Epstein, "Radical Democracy and Cultural Politics: What About Class, What About Political Power?," in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, ed. David Trend (London: Routledge, 1996), Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 159-62, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 11-12.

Mouffe insists that it is important to think of concepts such as political community not as "empirical referents" but as "discursive surfaces".⁷⁴ That is to say, community is not a really existing thing but a contingent surface upon which we inscribe our identities. Her prioritisation of ideology evolves into a prioritisation of discourse. All social objects, and social agents as human beings, are constituted by discursive articulation. This leaves us as purely historical and contingent creatures, or ontologically contingent social vessels. Mouffe claims not to be denying the material world, but instead to be observing that it has no significance outside of discourse. She suggests that "what is denied is not so much that objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside of any discursive condition of emergence."⁷⁵ It appears that Mouffe is ready to admit of some prior conditions, in social structure and in agential being. She insists, however, that they are only ever made manifest through discursive practice. In this formulation there is an indication of emergent practice as an ontology, of matter in motion as an a priori condition. Mouffe seems, on the contrary however, to be committed to the idea that all intransitive objects, objects constituted themselves outside of discursive emergence, are meaningless.⁷⁶ This leads to the idealist epistemic fallacy, that changes in description lead to changes in the objects themselves, or that changes in ideas about the object alter the actual being of the object. Such Wittgensteinian communities, forms of life, are self-maintaining mechanisms which are an effective means of discouraging questions or criticism. Such a community "may be so poor - literally or conceptually, and usually both, ...that its members simply lack the conceptual tools ...to break out or to break into a new order in any substantial way superior to the old."⁷⁷ Mouffe's social objects and

⁷⁴ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 71.

⁷⁵ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 108.

⁷⁶ Geras, "Post-Marxism," 65-66.

⁷⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change, (the Nature of Human Society Series.)* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 193.

agents are inescapably part of a community of 'we', where mutuality is thus reduced to the inevitably limited conceptualisations of the community.⁷⁸

The material, real world is reduced to the conceptions 'we', in our communities of discourse, have of them. This 'being' becomes merely the discursive description and re-description in particular communities, and renders existence outside this community of discourse meaningless, from which nothing can follow.⁷⁹ The 'materialist nature of ideology' which Mouffe stresses⁸⁰ no longer concerns what exists, but is about how social objects are articulated. For Mouffe this is far more significant than any persisting material or structural reality. Hegemonies are thus incommensurable communities, unable to understand each other and only able to bump against and shout at each other in a struggle to be heard. This is what makes 'truth': power. Social practices such as science or democracy, however, are not merely the trading of blows, or ever more raised voices. Rather, democracy must access the presented ideas, interests and desires of its members by investigating the real objects, needs and capacities that lie behind them, to which they refer. The ephemeral practices of description and re-description depend on the durable status of structures and character independent of our knowledge of them, but which, nonetheless can be accessed through their effects on our experience. The incommensurability between citizens and discourses inherent in Mouffe's theory of participatory democracy leaves her theory very weak. The hegemonic struggle must be between competing descriptive discourses. For them to be in competition in the first place, however, there must be a common existence of some sort over which their discourses disagree.⁸¹ By denying significance to any

⁷⁸ Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*, 111.

⁷⁹ Norman Geras, *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (London: Verso, 1990), 111.

⁸⁰ Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci." cited in Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*, 109.

⁸¹ Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis*, 113.

extra-discursive existence Mouffe severs the inter-relationship of reference. Rational debate is devalued and brute power becomes the only arbiter. This brute power will of course, however, have material, political and particularly economic resources and manifestations.

The shell within which Mouffe's radical democracy must reside is that of a way of life, a democratic ethos, where the fluid identities of agonistic citizens can come together in a shared allegiance to basic democratic principles. This is the hegemony which she posits in *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy*, a new hegemony of the principle of democratic procedure. Mouffe's participatory democracy lays great stress on the experiences and practices which adversaries would have in common. Experience and political activity are valued over procedure, because procedure cannot operate formally devoid of substance. What is important in the search for participatory democracy is to bring about a 'democratic ethos', which entails not merely a procedural but a substantive commitment to democracy rooted in shared understandings. This is Mouffe's common ground with communitarians. A commitment to the same principle that justice cannot develop in a vacuum, but must grow within a community. Mouffe, however, is unable to accept that a choice must then be made between 'the right' and 'the good'. Her position is that differing conceptions of 'the good life' will always remain and that these differences are legitimate.⁸² This leads her to a form of multiculturalism, where diversity and difference do not descend into chaos and conflict because of a communitarian gathering around shared tradition, custom, or adherence to the virtues of the 'democratic imaginary'. The problem is that her implicit, thin theory of human nature,⁸³ is unable to bear the weight of the 'inter-subjective practices' which would form the basis of a radical democratic consensus.

⁸² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 7, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 31, 45-48.

⁸³ Which is explored here in section 4, *Articulation or Mediation*

Using Wittgenstein's theory, Mouffe seeks to show how these inter-subjective practices would be games in which the language of democracy would form the rules of the game. There are, she further insists, a plurality of ways of playing the game, as there are a plurality of versions of the good life they seek to propagate and enhance.⁸⁴ How then are the rules of the game expected to apply? How can the dynamics of power and domination work in ways that value a wide range of experiences and practices? Shared experience of day-to-day living in communities would seem to form a very narrow basis for grounding the rules of the democratic game. In developing an account of the relationship of the diverse elements of discursive contestation, and of social change, Mouffe lays the foundations for her justification for participatory democracy. Such a participatory democracy would reflect the actual structure and processes of society to maximise the potential for articulation and re-articulation of difference.

Democratic structural post-structuralism

The account of society and of social change which Mouffe develops, with its intersecting planes of social, agential, and culturally emergent discourses, bears a number of similarities to a critical realist account of social reality. The isolated individualism of Mouffe's agonistic narrative together with her anti-essentialism, however, is unable to adequately account for the possibility of a democratic community or the emergence of emancipatory or directed forms of resistance.

Mouffe views the concept of society as 'an impossibility' as it is an unstable, open-ended system of relationally constructed identities. For her, society cannot exist as a unified totality bounded by necessary laws. Social identities are not fixed, but are asserted in

⁸⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, ix, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 17, 65, 76.

relation to 'the other'.⁸⁵ In Mouffe's communities of democracy all social relations of identity are established negatively, by reference to the common elements of what they are not.⁸⁶ Communities coalesce through reference to overarching 'relations of similitude', or equivalence amongst groups of individuals. Those that do not share our democratic imaginary remain beyond the pale. All social identities fabricated in this way are historically variable, thus they can be neither essential nor necessary. This fails, however, to address the common stock of resources upon which these diverse identities draw. Identities can be seen after all as merely surface dressing for human being, or as the vocabulary of the deeper discourse of social living. In the same way that Hirst's off-handed dismissal of Cole's strong belief in a 'spirit of associations' was unfounded, a similar objection can be made to Mouffe's insistence on the deep unfixity of social identities.⁸⁷ Of course identities are historically variable, but people can join together in forming their identities for particular social and deep psychological purposes. Identities themselves may change over time, but what remains is the seeking of an identity, both personal and social. The specific moments are necessarily not all that there is. They are articulations, but Mouffe, however, makes no reference to what they may be articulations of.⁸⁸

Mouffe acknowledges that these identities, although fundamentally indeterminate, are not in a radical state of flux. They are partially stabilized and privileged ideological positions of which the socio-sexual identity of man/woman is a clear example. There are however infinite potential meanings which could be drawn upon from which new social groupings or social identities, relations of similitude in

⁸⁵ This is a concept Mouffe draws from Derrida. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 127-34, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 114, 41.

⁸⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 223.

⁸⁷ Hirst, *Associative Democracy*, 45-46.

⁸⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 179, Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 5, 60-77, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 75-78.

Mouffe's language, could be constructed.⁸⁹ Thus Mouffe's social theory presents the paradox of an infinity of possible meanings, temporarily solidified in ideological points of capture, and an infinity of agents each seeking to define their difference from an infinity of others doing the same, but somehow held together in relatively intransitive social identities. As a consequence there are no privileged sites of political conflict. Economic relations are no more important or politically productive than any number of life-style choices. There are instead a multiplicity of points of political struggle or potential sites of democratic struggle. These (nodal) points are defined or pictured on different levels of social being, such as the cultural, the social, and the individual, which are each historically specific.⁹⁰

In common with the other theorists analysed in this thesis, Mouffe characterises participatory democracy as a mode of being, and not merely a form of fixed representational government. Mere procedural mechanisms⁹¹ are rejected in favour of a principle of "democratic equivalence" which recognises the "irreducible moment of the plurality of [political] spaces."⁹² In other words, there will always be groups outside a given community of identity, but the possibility of their inclusion, or partial absorption of elements of their identity through democratic equivalence, creates a potential for change.⁹³ Social identity can thus be seen to be fluid, moving in, out, and through the social and historical structure. The constant infecting and re-infecting of ideas constitutes both the process of history and of participatory democracy. It is the condition of, and the guarantee that, the democratic process will be kept alive in a constant process

⁸⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 7, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 68.

⁹⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xi, 112. This is a further example of what New calls Laclau & Mouffe's periodisation thesis. New, *Agency, Health & Survival: The Eopolitics of Rival Psychologies*, 5.

⁹¹ She is here attacking deliberative theorists, Rawls and Habermas, and their followers. See Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 80-90.

⁹² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 184.

⁹³ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 12-13, 21, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 114, 41.

of contestation. It most definitely cannot be seen as teleologically progressive. This pluralist shifting around is like the movement of clouds, constantly changing form and presenting an always unfamiliar shape through the interaction of its constituent parts. Democracy must be, just as our actual social existence is, a constant, dynamic, lived, and living experience, which is not an institution but a constitution. It is the emergence and development of this phenomena from particular historical confluences which Mouffe traces in her structural post-structuralism.

According to Mouffe the democratic bacillus arrived through the French Revolution, infecting the social vocabulary with the idea of the sovereignty of the people.⁹⁴ It is this political idea of individual sovereignty which becomes primary over the economic, and in developed and developing ways spreading to further elements of social discourse. Socialist demands for economic equality should be seen as but one point, one inevitable development, in the history of a spreading democratic virus. For women, from the initial gaining of political rights, the virus of democratic equivalence spread to demands for economic equality, then sexual equality. Thus socialist struggles for economic equality are one manifestation of the democratic hegemony.⁹⁵ Mouffe quotes approvingly de Tocqueville in connection with this idea of the spreading democratic idea, when he said that "it is impossible to believe that equality will not penetrate as much into the political world as into other domains."⁹⁶ Through the continual spreading of this idea inequality in one area is exposed by comparison with other areas, so that each subsequently identified inequality becomes intolerable. In this way the discourse of democracy, once it gained hegemonic status, began to throw a critical light on more and more areas of social life.

We are forced by the 'democratic imaginary', claims Mouffe, to recognise the impossibility of representing relations of subordination

⁹⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 155.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁹⁶ Tocqueville, *De la demoratie en Amerique*. Paris 1981 Vol. 1 p 115, quoted in *Ibid.* Although Tocqueville was rueful and resigned in making this observation.

as closed systems of difference. Discourse is always open and contestable and it therefore enables us to construct ways of recognising oppressive relations. Rather than being absorbed into the social structure, relations of subordination can be reinterpreted as oppression. Thus identified they can be resisted or replaced. This implies that the identities of subordinator and subordinated, master and slave, are essentially separated. They are not parts of a whole, separated artificially by relations of production. They do not share a common human core, but are fundamentally in conflictual, agonistic relations to each other. It is as though Mouffe is claiming that before democracy it was impossible to even imagine gender inequality or conceive of the social and human deprivation of huge identifiable groups of people, because the discursive language to depict it was not available.

Viewed as the choice between the theoretical concepts of the 'external articulation' of separate factors, versus the 'internal mediation' of a fragmented whole, social conflict must be seen as the external articulation of fragments, rather than as the internal mediations of the elements of the human/social whole. Master/slave relations are incommensurable differences clashing against each other, rather than each being a partial identity which happens to be emphasised more in one direction than another. Mouffe thus paints a picture of the human world as a constant clash melded together only by some kind of commitment to process, a faith in discourse that respect for plurality will guarantee that, eventually, 'each dog will have its day'.

To see master/slave relations as perverted or unbalanced mediations between human solutions to paradoxical impulses, would, however, offer a theory of a concrete social body which could then be grasped and understood much more hopefully. Mouffe's argument may, however, help us to understand difference within difference. For instance, all struggle is basically reactionary for Mouffe, a reaction against the threatened loss of an identity, a process of reactionary defence of a corner of life held against a colonising

force.⁹⁷ This process, she says, can also be radical, and this has a resonance with Fromm's concept of social character. People have to find ways to survive in changing social conditions. Human beings are flexible and adaptive, says Fromm, but not infinitely adaptable. A limit to our nature can be reached where violent reaction, or catastrophic mental and social collapse occurs.⁹⁸ For Mouffe, however, this is the point where the "equivalential displacement peculiar to the democratic imaginary" comes into play.⁹⁹ In other words, similar preferences of identity will cluster around each other and pursue their shared ends in association. This is comparable to G.D.H. Cole's associative pluralism.¹⁰⁰ Indeed Mouffe draws upon Hirst's re-appropriation of Guild Socialism as a counter to Bobbio's overly individualist liberalism.¹⁰¹ Where Cole's associations are pursuing their material will in changing the world in which they live, Mouffe's are looking for ways to define and protect their personal identity. Mouffe's citizens are "radical reactionaries".¹⁰² These new group formations will throw into sharp relief the structure of different aspects of the existing order as they form and reform, coalesce and move on. In this way the unstable plurality of identities, and thus of defensive groupings, will create new and unexpected fronts of radical possibility.

Consider, for instance, the identity of the working class. The working class were always a heterogeneous association.¹⁰³ It was, in Mouffe's view, an amalgam of 'old' workers struggling or reacting in established communities against confusing economic change, and

⁹⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁹⁸ Fromm, *The Sane Society*.

⁹⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 158-59.

¹⁰⁰ Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, Cole, *Social Theory*.

¹⁰¹ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 98-99. Norberto Bobbio, *Liberalism and Democracy* (London: Verso, 1990), Hirst, *From Statism to Pluralism: Democracy, Civil Society and Global Politics*.

¹⁰² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 158.

¹⁰³ Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism During the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, 1982), 140. cited in Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 156.

'new' industrial workers struggling from a considerably weaker social base, but from within the developing industrial environment. The relationship between workers and capitalists is therefore absorbed as legitimate differential positions within the same discursive environment.¹⁰⁴ Generally what develops is not a struggle against capitalism as such, but for improved conditions within the existing system/paradigm/hegemony. Mouffe does, however, object to the natural outgrowth of this idea of "a unified discursive space" as it is manifest in the 'Third Way'.¹⁰⁵

Most resistance is therefore characterised in Mouffe's system as merely reactionary resistance from within the system, to changes that the system itself imposes.¹⁰⁶ Workers seek to protect their position within the capitalist system, as capital seeks to 'modernise' their terms and conditions. Radical new subjectivities can, however, discursively reformulate relationships so that external powers are reformulated (again) or (re)interpreted as oppressive, "discursively constructing [them] as an external imposition."¹⁰⁷ Thus the way that society is perceived, and the way that individuals choose to conduct themselves in it, or the words they use to express the world, change the 'actual' nature of it. This means that unless a freedom is considered a possibility, there cannot be the ability to see something which blocks the enjoyment of that freedom as an oppression. When women were nothing other than property and chattel there was no conceivable way for that to be perceived as an oppressive situation. Judged against the standard, however, of a fully human potential they were oppressed, although relatively they may not have seemed oppressed in that social context/environment.¹⁰⁸ The democratic imaginary is a state of mind which Mouffe presents as a new phenomena, instituted by the French Revolution. The resistance to

¹⁰⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 157.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 158, Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*.

¹⁰⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 158.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

oppression, however, in the human struggle for a secure, just, and fully realised life can actually be evidenced through a wide and rich history of struggle and resistance.¹⁰⁹ It may well be that examples of this struggle have been kept from the wider world by the 'second face of power',¹¹⁰ but they were nevertheless real. The asymmetry of the structural forces of power is underappreciated in Mouffe's Foucauldian and discursive social theory.

A terrain for the deepening and broadening of the democratic revolution has been made possible, Mouffe claims, through the complex and often contradictory nature of late capitalism.¹¹¹ Its manifestation is the New Social Movements. As Epstein has shown, however, much of what survived or prospered in emancipatory struggle was that which was structurally organised.¹¹² There is a form of structural description in Mouffe's work, especially when she talks of the ways that antagonisms begin to become seen as oppressions; "social relations which had not been constructed under the form of subordination begin to be [seen as oppressions] under the impact of certain social transformations."¹¹³ What begins to emerge here is the interplay of the discursive potentialities of social, cultural, and agential planes.

¹⁰⁹ See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965). Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Palladin, 1970).

¹¹⁰ See John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View, Studies in Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

¹¹¹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 158.

¹¹² Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1991). On the inadequacy of NSM theory, particularly in relation to the European Peace Movement, see Russell J. Dalton and Manfred Kuechler, *Challenging the Political Order: New Social and Political Movements in Western Democracies, Europe and the International Order* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990). Margit Mayer and Roland Roth, "New Social Movements and the Transformation to Post-Fordist Society," in *Cultural Politics and Social Movements*, ed. Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein, and Richard Flacks (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

¹¹³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 159.

These planes intersect or slide across each other to create a shifting landscape of subordinations, antagonisms, differences, and oppressions: "But in every case what allows the forms of resistance to assume the character of collective struggles is the existence of an external discourse which impedes the stabilisation of subordination as difference."¹¹⁴ The meaning here is unclear, but it seems to read as though difference is being characterised as an ideological covering for subordination. This is odd as the constant search for and expression of difference is at the core of Mouffe's view of the human condition. The role of unique individualism is raised again a few lines later. NSMs play a central role in Mouffe's political landscape, most especially over and above class-based struggles, as they play a "novel role in articulating that rapid diffusion of social conflictuality to more and more numerous relations."¹¹⁵ Far from seeing this as a fragmentation of our ability to grasp the nature of subordination, which is to be resisted, she grasps 'subordination in difference' as the model of political activity. Agonistic conflict again emerges as the central locus of Mouffe's social structure, and of human being.

The pursuit of difference in each identity is premised on the unavailability of the 'constitutive outside', the threatening other which helps to define the 'we' of the political community. The democratic imaginary, however, implies transcendence, a coming together of all under a banner of right behaviour towards each other despite differences. There is a paradox here, which her theory cannot overcome except through celebrating the paradox. The paradox of liberty and equality is really no such thing if Marx's point that the full flourishing of each is dependent on the flourishing of all is absorbed. Mouffe actually cites this although she means it in a very particular way.¹¹⁶ Conflict is built into her view of flourishing in terms of the legitimate expression of difference. Mouffe's theory is therefore able to illuminate the complex interplay of the various levels of social phenomena, and it is admirably able to suggest the

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-60.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

ways in which culture, capitalism, discourse, and identity each play-off against the other to create the shifting terrain of politics. In this way oppressions are highlighted and the resources to resist them are created in social discourse. Mouffe's participatory democracy seeks to legitimate and contain conflict in a reciprocal proceduralism, because the fragmented shards of human life cannot be reconciled.¹¹⁷

While social structures are in a constant state of flux, these changing structures create new political subjects, that is, new human relationships and modes of behaviour. These new political subjects are "constituted through their antagonistic relationship to recent forms of subordination."¹¹⁸ Primary amongst these recent forms are of course capitalist forms of production and associated state intervention.¹¹⁹ Although Mouffe believes it is pointless to talk of the notion of 'class' struggles, capitalism itself seems to be allowed a 'real' effective status. She talks of "the reorganisation" of capitalism after the 1939-45 war, of "modifications at the level of the labour process", and "the penetration of capitalist relations of production", which create new problems affecting "the organisation of the whole of social life outside of work".¹²⁰ Eventually, "there is practically no domain of individual or collective life which escapes capitalist relations."¹²¹ So whilst Mouffe is able to allow for structural forces in human social life, and for these structures to be enduring and effective, that is, to be real, having real effects, her insistence on individual discourse as the originating point of 'political activation' pulls against this structural view. Such a dialectical tension is a promising basis for participatory democracy. However, this schema begins to collapse when a deeper investigation is carried out into the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 122.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 160.

¹¹⁹ Robert E. Goodin, *The Real Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Alexander M. Hicks, *Social Democracy and Welfare Capitalism: A Century of Income Security Politics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

¹²⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 160-61.

¹²¹ Ibid., 161. Emphasis added.

ontological presuppositions of Mouffe's concept of the individual political agent, particularly in the choice of 'articulation' over 'mediation' as the preferred descriptive noun of human interaction.

Articulation or mediation

The basic premise of Mouffe's ontology is that there never was a unified universe, and there never will be. Agonistic individualism, despite the evident interdependence of political actors and agents, is a central motif in her view of the universe and of human being. These fragmented elements have two strategies open to them in the search for community: articulation or mediation. Mouffe insists that articulation is the only possible response.¹²² The abandoned strategy of mediation is, however, more resilient than Mouffe suggests. Her conception of political praxis displays a very pragmatic attitude. It is an approach "privileging the moment of political articulation."¹²³ As has been shown, the central category of her political analysis is hegemony, thus, in essence there is a pragmatic action-based philosophy here. The prime element of her politics, hegemony, is the cultural saturation of a particular ideology. This amounts to a TINA formation, where the possible alternatives of praxis are circumscribed, or at the least, partially defined by the culturally prevailing norms. Thus the agonistic ground, the space where change can occur, is the contestability, the clash of cultural formations and ideas. This is fair enough, but what is the substance of these ideas? Most especially of the particular socialist culture Mouffe wishes to be the new hegemony?

There are not the resources in Mouffe's philosophy to claim these socialist precepts of equality, social justice, and a productive life as the truth or the only just order, but it is clear that she holds these to be at least a better set of ideas that she wishes to see on the

¹²² Ibid., 93-94.

¹²³ Ibid., x. (emphasis added)

ascendant.¹²⁴ Perhaps more importantly, what is the origin of these ideas, their genealogy? What social forces, or human drives, could possibly produce them. Critical realism could offer us some purchase on this problem with its idea of structural regress, of stratified reality, peeling back the layers of effect to the alethic core.¹²⁵ This involves our self-mediation with our own knowledge of self and the world. The deeper our knowledge the closer we come to uniting our internal life with external reality, or our emergent causal powers with our material existence. In Mouffe's ontology, on the other hand, because social identity is relational there is an implied breaking-up or dissolution of the various planes of social being, there is "an unevenness between the articulator and the articulated on which the hegemonic link is founded."¹²⁶ Politics and democracy by this definition can only be the social praxis, the rearticulation, of isolated elements. We are, however, part of a fragmented whole, of nature, of which we are both a part of and apart from. This is why human activity is part of a mediation *and* an articulation. We are creatures with a nature, an essence - that is to say, limits - and also the creators/producers of our 'natural' environment. The whole is fragmented because we have fallen, we are self-aware, we know, and because we have produced structures which have 'a life of their own', which make other demands, and articulate different 'natures'.

As has already been observed, the evidence upon which Mouffe builds her case has been carefully selected. As shown above a clearer critical analysis of the situation could, however, throw up an entirely different proof. The 'fragments' and 'organisation' of the second, mediation, approach which Mouffe rejects must surely be part of the same whole, for, just as we can actively 'organise ourselves'¹²⁷ so we are necessarily responsible for the fragmentation of the social world.

¹²⁴ This is clear from the title of HSS at least. Ibid. see also Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

¹²⁵ R. Groff, "The Truth of the Matter - Roy Bhaskar's Critical Realism and the Concept of Alethic Truth," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 30, no. 3 (2000).

¹²⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 93.

¹²⁷ Mouffe draws this phrase from Holderlin. Ibid., 94.

These fragmentations are the result, at least partially and evidently, of those structures which we or our predecessors have created, and the political choices made by them. Our social, political, and economic structures will endure without conscious re-creation, but they are the fundamental stuff of our daily articulations, our vocabularies of action, morality, hope, and possibility. We are born into them and we can change them, but they are not conditions entirely of our own choosing.

It is clear that for Mouffe identity, and therefore all social interaction, is antagonistic, but surely there is no reason why this has to be an antagonistic relationship. Mouffe's participatory democracy is an attempt to legitimise this unavoidable ontological reality, and tame it into agonism. She constantly draws upon the preconception that we are necessarily antagonistic individuals each seeking to impose or find a way of having a 'sutured', cohering identity. As such this constitutes an implicit, though 'thin', human nature. In her world antagonistic relationships are the ontologically unavoidable reality. We are, however, also necessarily in interdependent relationships of struggle (to find our way) here. This interdependency may also be an unavoidable ontological fact. This state of affairs could at least as usefully be seen as grounded in a positive interpretation of that interdependence, rather than the negative antagonism Mouffe persistently cleaves to.

Mouffe identifies a legitimate tragedy in human being, but she takes this to be the all of it. She commits the epistemological fallacy here as she did with regard to NSMs. For Mouffe, we are sealed off from the life of other groups just as we are from the inner lives of others in our group. This sceptical conception of our inner life forces Mouffe to misread sentiments such as 'I know you are in pain', as purported statements of knowledge. They need not be false assertions about unknowable others, but rather attempts to bridge the divide that is all too real in Mouffe's account. She is unable to read such statements as expressions of acknowledgement of a common, human, life; as statements motivated by a connection between the inner lives of individuals. Some acts of saying 'we' do not involve exclusion, but can be acts of mediation, as statements

which offer connection and offer the right to make a claim upon the giver.¹²⁸ These acknowledgements of suffering and offers of the gift of connection do not draw a boundary because they are not meant as an attempt to encircle and define a group of resistance.¹²⁹ Instead of being sceptical of others, of cleaving to the exclusionary necessity of 'we', such statements could be viewed as the acts of discourse of an 'us'-ness, as an acknowledgement of the suffering of others. My acknowledgement of your suffering is not a claim to knowledge, separating us both apart. Such a statement could actually be meant as, and taken as, a bridging of that gap, with an acknowledgement that your suffering makes a claim upon me.

Concluding comments

There is great value in Mouffe's insight of the tragedy/paradox of difference, the tragedy of the human tendency to incomprehension. This is, however, only a tendency, not a necessity. Mouffe inflates this observation into a metaphysical whole, an ontology, whereas it is merely an epistemological incident, one amongst many less misanthropic others. There are of course no guarantees of success in trying to bring groups together, as democracy seeks to manage. Genuine tragedy is always possible. Two different groups might have such divergent needs or experiences that neither is capable of recognizing the claims made by members of the other. This sad fact, which is the truth that motivates Mouffe, she turns into a foundational tenet. Instead of alerting us to the possibility of failure, she proclaims its conceptual necessity. As such, there are elements of behaviourism in Mouffe's prioritising of political activity as an ontological base. Her behaviourist pragmatism; the privileging of "the moment of political articulation"¹³⁰, the constitutive paradox of

¹²⁸ Alessandra Tanesini, "In Search of Community: Mouffe, Wittgenstein and Cavell," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 110 (2001): 18.

¹²⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 157-58.

¹³⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, x.

democracy itself, and the Derridean 'constitutive outside', are all based on a scepticism about human nature.

For Mouffe, the role of difference in identity formation and maintenance is founded on the ultimate unknowability of the person behind the identity or behaviour. The inner life of others is a necessary mystery. Therefore, Mouffe privileges the surface of the individual, the front we present in order to communicate that which others cannot have direct access to. There is no essential human nature, claims Mouffe, despite the 'real' elements, the essentialisms, clearly identifiable in her work. The inner lives of others could only be understood if we could see directly inside them. These inner workings are unavailable to us, and Mouffe is unable to draw upon any theory which claims to an essentialist knowledge of a human nature to help. All that can be drawn upon are the actual behaviours of others, their discourses, both linguistic and practical.

If, however, the conflicts of identity were to be conceived of through a critical realist perspective, as created by the perversion of our interdependencies by master-slave type relationships - of capitalism, patriarchalism etc. - strategies of resolution will present themselves which are not based on enmity or adversary. Rather than being the essential stuff of human being and the world, these differences would no longer be the 'constitutive paradox's' of contingent identity struggles, but the structural interlocking of planes of reality and interactions of various emergent powers. These powers are the elements of social, economic, and human phenomena which constitute their essential being. Such a critical realist formulation shares with Mouffe the desirability of widening the appropriate areas for democratic activity away from any privileged political actor. Mouffe does indeed set her face against capitalism and the master-slave elements of it, but her philosophical foundations make it difficult for her to support any motivations of human solidarity, across communities or generations.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurled:
The glory, jest and riddle of the world!

Alexander Pope *Essay on Man* (1733)

The starting point of philosophy is that we do not understand ourselves well enough. We do not understand ourselves well enough ethically (how or why we should be concerned, positively or negatively, with some human dispositions and practices rather than others); we do not fully understand our political ideals; and we do not understand how we come to have ideas and experiences, and seem moreover to know quite a lot about the world.

Bernard Williams '*Why philosophy needs history*'
(2002)

Introduction

Through a survey and analysis of various theoretical justifications for participatory democracy I have shown that those which evade the question of human nature encounter various difficulties of internal coherence. Evasion of this issue takes a number of forms, from straightforwardly ignoring or failing to address it, to an outright dismissal of the concept itself. Some theorists, like Dewey and Pateman have observed that conceptions of human nature have been used to support and justify oppressive or exploitative regimes. It could be concluded that, on this view any call to human nature must necessarily be bad, irrelevant or merely ill-informed. On the other hand, human nature could be accepted as a feature of social and political life, but emptied of any meaningful substance through a radical historicizing. Still other reactions see human nature as an ontological imposition on an undecidable terrain of contestation, which damages effective political action. It is my contention that while participatory democracy calls for radically expanded political involvement of human beings in human societies, to avoid or ignore what this involvement is *for* empties those theories of much of their useful content.

I have examined and analysed a selection of influential moments in twentieth century participatory democracy theory, and identified two broad strands of philosophical justification for participatory democracy, referred to as *essentialist affirmation* and *pragmatic scepticism*. In the case of Cole, Fromm, and Pateman a broadly essentialist justification of participatory democracy has found expression through productive and industrial, psychoanalytical, and gender equality criteria. Dewey, Barber, and Mouffe, in contrast have sought to justify participatory democracy through a contingent or pragmatic philosophical schema. These latter three theorists have concentrated their analysis and prescription around the forms of community which a participatory democracy presupposes and fosters: 'scientific', communitarian, and agonistic respectively.

The 'essentialist' theorists are rather more clearly working from a realist basis. They each hold to some form of the general philosophical principle that there are objects in the physical, social, and psychological world which exist and have properties independently of our theoretical concepts of, or discourses about, them.¹ The pragmatic sceptics, Dewey, Barber, and Mouffe, however, deny such an ontological doctrine and purport to rely wholly on epistemological phenomena to articulate their account of the world. They expend a good deal of energy denying 'the real' as a post hoc rationalisation of particular political orders.² It is evident, however, that they do hold to varying levels of implicit realism, of social consequences, community, and discourse.

The Justificatory Spectrum

It can be appreciated from this brief summary that, although I have identified two justificatory threads in participatory democratic theory, there are distinct differences between the theorists in each thread. It is useful to conceptualise these two general threads as together constituting a spectrum, divided into two broad ranges of related values. At the pragmatic sceptical extreme stands Benjamin Barber, whereas, at the essentialist affirming end stands Erich Fromm. In the middle, where the two tendencies part company, are John Dewey and G.D.H. Cole. Each share some space with the other, but each has, nonetheless, opposed underlying tendencies which keep them philosophically separate; with Dewey on the pragmatic, and Cole on the essentialist side. Linking each of these two sets of theorists are Mouffe on the pragmatic side, and Pateman on the essentialist side (see fig. 1, below).

¹ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*.

² See for instance Benjamin R. Barber, *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 97-98, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), Chpt 1.

citizens and how are they related to each other, their society, and the wider world?

While it is true that the power of participatory democracy argument is weakened by its attenuation along a broad justificatory spectrum, the differences amongst these various theorists pales into insignificance compared to their similarities. For the explanatory force of them all to be combined an underlabouring philosophy of ontological depth is required. This would provide the basis of creating from that explanatory power an emancipatory theory of participatory democracy. In the second part of this chapter the beginnings of a theoretical basis for just such a foundation will be made by foregrounding the concept of human nature through a critical realist framework. This theory of science and social reality, whilst reclaiming ontology, is not a closed foundational system but is open, fallibilist, and stratified. It enables us to appreciate the complex interconnectedness of individuals, classes, social structure, and history.

It is clear that any theory of participatory democracy must take account of the motivational complexity of those people it seeks to convince and serve. Additionally, clear knowledge of such complexity will assist in designing an institutional system which demands only that which can *reasonably* be expected of them.³ Of central importance for our purposes therefore is an ontology of the agent, a view of what people are so that prescriptions for deepening democracy might be more firmly embedded, and more attuned to success than to ignominious and 'told-you-so' failure. In order to move towards such an ontology of the agent, the spectrum of the diverse philosophical justifications for participatory democracy I have analysed will now be presented, before moving to a consideration of the critical realist case. I will begin at the pragmatic sceptical end of the spectrum and work towards the essentialist affirming position, indicating the various positions between each extreme.

³ Nagel, "What Makes a Political Theory Utopian?"

The Pragmatic Sceptics

The most sceptical position from which participatory democracy is justified is taken by Benjamin Barber. All essential, universalising philosophical strategies are dismissed and decried by Barber, as damaging and misleading to political activity. His interventions into participatory democracy theory share much of the communitarian tradition of disappointment and antipathy towards liberal representative democracy, and he longs for the ideal of a vigorous citizenry engaged in the culture and politics of a vital society.⁴ He is deeply concerned about the malady of isolation and political apathy which he sees as currently prevailing, to which his conception of participatory democracy offers the remedy. At this philosophical extreme of the spectrum any attempt to conflate the ungrounded diversity of reality in a fixed form of representation can only be misleading. Both political and artistic representation, for instance, are implicated, claims Barber, in a conspiracy of self-deception where "common illusion allows [representatives and represented] to live out sterile fantasies without substance, ... to take risks with nothing at stake."⁵ Between representative and represented a bogus existence is fabricated which relieves both of public responsibility for the biases of their opinion. Political activity is, however, shared common civic activity, and the 'truth' of that activity is revealed in its workability, its delivery power, rather than in any fixed position of universal veracity.⁶

From Barber's perspective on the spectrum no enduring conception of human nature can have any role in democratic theory. There are, however, a number of preconceptions of the human subject and the nature of the social world, even in Barber's work, which amount to a theory of human nature. The problem of representation, for instance,

⁴ For Barber's communitarian credentials see Benjamin R. Barber, "A Mandate for Liberty: Requiring Education-Based Community Service," in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

⁵ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 9.

⁶ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 199.

raises the question of authenticity for the actor who counterfeits "himself in defiance of his own nature".⁷ Barber also perceives a common, human ability to "discover and legislate a common weal".⁸ Human beings appear to have an indwelling ability to perceive absences and what could be fulfilling, to posit their location and search for them, and then to secure those conditions in rationally constructed legislation. If we are capable of discovering or creating 'common good will' there must also be both a capacity and a need for solidarity.

For Barber, however, there is not a universal, common good that can be revealed by politics. He sees the quest for certainty concerning universals as a weakness to be overcome. Before the political action of common striving there is nothing. We are subject to the buffeting of the 'naturally' boundless sea of a conceptually ungrounded universe. The immediate results and conditions of our active citizenship are all we can rely on, and *contingent roots* in active democratic communities must be put down and defended assiduously. As isolated, fragmented individuals we do not really exist until we join together in common life, where the "dreams that are engendered by politics ... emerge".⁹

As we move towards the middle ground of the spectrum where scepticism gives way to affirmation, the communitarian behaviourism of Chantal Mouffe remains a distinctly sceptical position. Drawing upon the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein, and Derrida her theorisations of a 'radical democracy' represents the most recent development of the pragmatic sceptical thread of participatory democracy theory. Mouffe has developed a post-modern account of democratic politics centred on discourse theory, where all essentialist and foundational ontology is eschewed in favour of a radical commitment to the concepts of difference and discourse, and

⁷ Barber, "Rousseau and Brecht," 19.

⁸ Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

the articulation of diverse identities in an open field of radical agonistic contestation.

Mouffe's account of social change is premised on the ontological contestability of identity, and she offers a convincing account of how discursive interaction can create, dissolve, and recreate connections and social forms. In such an ontologically seated world, however, human being is irredeemably alienated from itself by the need to discern each identity against 'the constitutive other'. The inner lives of others cannot be accessed at all except as a defining otherness. In Mouffe's world, our fellow human beings are eternally beyond our comprehension, and because Mouffe occupies a position where there is no essentialist ground or open conception of human nature, the shared deep emotional life of our fellows are unavailable to us. All that we could hope for, as routes of access to the motivations of others, are the actual behaviours of each other, our linguistic and practical discourses.

In a world formed of this kind of fragmentation a democratic system requires some means by which the subjects of the democracy may be identified. Mouffe relies on a 'democratic imaginary' to coalesce a shared commitment to the free pluralist flourishing of identities and versions of the good life. Shared commitment of this sort is also an underpinning ethic of communitarianism. Mouffe, however, subscribes to a moderate form of communitarianism, and she acknowledges that, although fundamentally indeterminate, human identity is not in a radical state of flux, but can be partially stabilized in communities and their hegemonic structures. There is, however, Mouffe insists, a fragmented infinity of potential meanings which *could* be drawn upon, from which new social groupings or social identities will be re/created. At this position on the spectrum as we can see, fragmentation remains a given. It should be readily appreciated, however, that such fragmentation must be the result, at least partially, of those structures which we or our predecessors have created, and of the political choices we all make. There must be *reasons* for the choices we make and, importantly, for the choices we *do not* make.

The position on the spectrum where pragmatic scepticism begins to give way to essentialist affirmation has now been reached. Here, the work of John Dewey provides a distinctly pragmatic approach which, nonetheless, begins to take on essentialist overtones. Although Dewey claimed that it is inappropriate for theories of participatory democracy to call upon the concept of human essence, his tireless intellectual curiosity pulled him close to the boundary between scepticism and affirmation.¹⁰ This can clearly be seen in Dewey's commitment to the concept of growth as a function of a democratic society. Growth in human self-knowledge is fostered by concerned and inquisitive inquirers making investigations and sharing their findings in public debate. Dewey's also presents his concept of growth as a function of human sociability, in that we are fuller and more complete human beings so far as we have wider and deeper familiarity of environments, experiences, and of others.¹¹ Certain qualities, he says, may "actually exist in human nature," Whenever claims have been made to the certainty of such and such a characteristic as an essential part of human nature, particular forms of political regime; feudal, liberal, market oriented, communistic, etc., have preceded them. Dewey's point seems to be that both conceptions are guilty of the same misapprehension. His response is typically pragmatic: impulses or motives are neither good nor bad. All that is significant are the consequences produced by, or the results of, action.¹² From this position, it is situated interaction which forms and conditions human nature, there is no fixity.¹³

This is Dewey's 'thin' conception of human nature which lends an instability to his theory of participatory democracy. Dewey developed an instrumental interpretation of reasoning which held that the truth

¹⁰ Dewey, "Freedom & Culture," LW13:141-42.

¹¹ John Dewey, "Democracy and Education," ([1916]), MW9:46, John Dewey, "Ethics," ([1908]), MW5:385, John Dewey, "Ethics 2nd Ed.," ([1932]), LW7:13-14, John Dewey, "Experience and Nature," ([1925]), LW1:273, John Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," ([1927]), LW2:251.

¹² *Ibid.*, 141.

¹³ *Ibid.*

is a tool used by human beings to solve problems, and that as those problems change so must the nature of truth.¹⁴ The emphasis in Dewey's instrumentalism on an empirical epistemology and an ontology of 'contingency' have a destabilising effect on both his ethical and political project. This results in a participatory democracy which is bound up within a process and procedure, unable to fully break out into deep critical evaluation of outcomes, and into the practical means of pushing through those barriers to fully human flourishing. In relying on a thin naturalistic ontology, Dewey is unable to fully imagine those absences and structures which are not immediately visible, but which are nonetheless real and serve to block and pervert any 'teleology of self-realisation'. His 'thin' conceptualisation of human nature, of self-realisation expressed as 'growth', and ultimately his pragmatic philosophy of action and inquiry, excludes precisely those elements which impinge on social and political situations most crucially, and thus his theory is unable to break through into any of the strengths which an essentialist ontology might deliver.

The Essentialist Affirmers

At this crucial point on the spectrum pragmatic scepticism gives way to the beginnings of essentialist affirmation. In outlining his social theory, G.D.H. Cole adopted a methodology which challenged the accepted ways of doing social and political theory. This was a tradition which saw social structures in the positivist terms of force and the rule of law.¹⁵ It was a form of analysis which centred around the power and coercion held by the state. For Cole this was a form of conceptual analysis which began with the wrong layer of social reality. Rather than describe the coercion which contained social order, he preferred to analyse and account for the motives which inspired, and held people together in association. A consequence of

¹⁴ Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*, 169-74.

¹⁵ Cole, *Social Theory*

this was to emphasise a conception of social power as *power to* in preference to *power over*. With this conceptual distinction of social forms of power as different generative mechanisms, Cole is able to bring into consideration possibilities other than empirically accountable instances.¹⁶ While he obviously thought it was important to understand why people gathered together to form associations of will, the good they implicitly sought to realise is necessarily implicated in such a move. It is of little surprise that the basis of this good life is little explored in the literature on Cole. Where metaphysical concepts are raised in this secondary literature, as in the work of Paul Hirst for instance, it is lightly dismissed with no concern for any loss of explanatory depth this dismissal might entail.¹⁷ While Cole remained unable to openly grapple with deeply metaphysical and ontological issues, they remained central, although still largely unarticulated, to all his work.

In fact, where Dewey's work issued from a pragmatic philosophy which could not contain his curiosity, to such an extent that he came to draw very close to an essentialism of a sort, Cole, on the other hand began from an implicitly essentialist position. He was, however, pushed away from expressing and openly exploring it by the generally pervasive suspicion towards metaphysics of the English empirical tradition, and by his wish to be useful to the labour movement, and Cole was firmly embedded in the empiricist tradition, which he saw, in a distinctly pragmatic way, as the best vehicle for such usefulness. His understanding of social power is similar to Bhaskar's distinction between the concepts of $power_1$ and $power_2$.¹⁸ They are essential categories in the examination of master-slave relationships, and translate to a clear grasp of the particularly *human* problem of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

¹⁸ "Power₁ is the transformative capacity intrinsic to the concept of action as such, whereas power₂ is the capacity to get one's own way against either the overt wishes and/or the real interests of others in virtue of structures of exploitation, domination, subjugation and control." Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 402.

contemporary society. It should be noted that, in Cole's analysis, the main problem facing society is not poverty but slavery.¹⁹ Without meaningful democratic participation in all realms of social, particularly in working, life we are subject to the interests of distant, unaccountable others and their ability to wield coercive power.

Cole believes that human beings have a natural internal capacity of freedom, that they are *naturally* free; but that is not all they are, they are 'all around in chains'.²⁰ Cole is clear that the universality he claims for individual human beings is overlain with obstacles and denials. Before a fully human life can be realised, these occlusions must be removed. Association is the human response to these obstacles, and important amongst these are the trade unions, which besides campaigning for better wages, were also beginning to articulate a deeper ideal. This was to enable people to express in their daily, necessary work, some part of "that infinitely subtle and various personality which lives in each one of them."²¹ Cole's concept of function is an important element of his social theory.²² It is in the choice of and between the 'functions of will' we wish to pursue, and "in assigning their relative places to the many functions, social and personal, of which we are conscious, that our *selfhood appears as a co-ordinating principle beyond any of them.*"²³ *Selfhood* is thus an essential ground to Cole's theory of function, which is of course a *social* principle. *Selfhood* is here formed, constructed, and realised within functional associations, and the human beings which form active associations of function, are in their nature universal.²⁴

While Cole can be interpreted as occupying some affirmative essentialist ground, his 'universal' human subject remains an

¹⁹ Cole, G.D.H. (1917) *Self-Government in Industry*. p 34

²⁰ Cole, *Social Theory*, 183.

²¹ Cole, *World of Labour*, 9.

²² G.D.H. Cole, *Social Theory* (London: Methuen, 1920), Chpt. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 48-49. emphasis added

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

empirical ensemble. It is productive, functional activity which draws all the diversities of a life together, and constitute the concrete individual. In a similar fashion society itself becomes an interconnected, mutually interdependent concrete whole. Given this it would be impossible to politically represent a human being as a self or a centre of consciousness.²⁵ In associated effort, each individual will be representing themselves, or at least that specific function which they are constructing in that association at that particular time.²⁶ Individual identity is thus somewhat fluid in form. In addition, the *sum of total social relations* is also significant to human being. Thus, at this point on the sceptical/affirmative spectrum there is a tension between fluid identity, a diversity of functions of will, and some conception of concrete universal subjectivity.

Cole identifies a human capacity for self-rule and the ability to manage affairs, to rationally debate, and make just judgement. These capacities, together with an evidently deep-seated need for social creativity begin to offer some elements of a full conceptualisation of human nature. Cole's wariness towards metaphysical concepts and ontological depth, however, makes it difficult to square this circle and to effectively identify the nature of the subject's relationship with the powerful social and economic structures they find themselves embedded in. Carole Pateman demonstrates a similar wariness, describing debate on essentialism as 'a distraction'.²⁷

The logic of Pateman's work, however, as I have shown indicates an underlying human essence. This logic moves us a little closer towards the essentialist area of the spectrum, and a full and open

²⁵ Ibid., 104-05.

²⁶ Ibid., 106.

²⁷ Pateman, personal communication, 9 August 2001. "There are capacities and attributes that are shared by all human beings. But how those develop, how they are expressed, what is valued, how humans behave, and so on depends on the culture and institutions within which particular humans grow up and continue to interact. My view is that talk of essences is mostly a distraction in political theory"

expression of human nature. Central to her critique is the 'story' of the social contract, a fiction which is told and re-told to create and maintain a particular political regime.²⁸ Pateman is deeply troubled by the liberal democratic concept of political contract, and asks why anybody would consent to be ruled by someone else? For self-assumed obligation to be given and maintained in liberal democracy is, she insists, deeply problematic.²⁹ Pateman maintains, however, that self-assumed obligation *itself* is *not* an incoherent idea, and that it can be made workable "through the development of the theory and practice of participatory or self-managing democracy."³⁰ The *democratic* account of political obligation offers possible workable solutions to the difficulties of justifying political obligation.

Pateman argues that participatory democracy allows citizens to order their political and social lives for themselves, and to decide when and what to assume obligations to. In such a democracy, citizens 'subordinate' themselves to their own *collective* judgement, rather than the judgement of distant others. Voting in a participatory democracy "creates a relationship of political obligation that is owed by each citizen to his or her fellow citizens: there is no one else to whom it could be owed."³¹ In contrast, the individual that is only concerned with self-serving private interests, atrophies not only their capacity for responsible public action, but also, paradoxically, those self-regarding virtues they throw themselves back on. Private money-getting activities use few of their faculties and turn them inward on themselves, narrowing and distorting those virtues and functions.³²

²⁸ Carole Pateman, *The Equivalent of Life, Land and Liberty: Democracy and the Idea of a Basic Income* (University of California, Los Angeles, 18 April 2001 [cited 14 January 2002]); available from <http://www.oid.ucla.edu/Webcast/FRL/Pateman/index.html>.

²⁹ Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³² Stuart Mill John and Garrett Fawcett Millicent, *On Liberty: Representative Government. The Subjection of Women; Three Essays, The World's Classics; 170* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 230., cited by Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 30.

We are led by Pateman's analysis to understand the conception of human nature as the product of the social environment, created away by limited and limiting social institutions. Implicit in this formula of human nature, as the transitive product of social environments is an underlying, relatively *in-transitive*, human essence. Pateman sets out a vision of democracy as consonant with an enduring human need for free, creative, and interdependent social activity. Narrow conceptions of the political, which exclude large areas of human life from the remit of democracy, divide people from each other and themselves. Pateman is arguing for a political form that treats social life as *necessarily* involving the idea of *obligation*: we are obligated simply by our inter-connected sociability. Her ontology of the self also involves denying the liberal philosophical justification of property in the person, as this sunders the person from their skills, talents, and being.³³ Pateman's human being cannot be alienated from its labour, its creativity, or social interdependence.

Furthermore, there are, she insists, certain basic human behaviours of mutual aid, forbearance, assistance and support to the sick and injured. These are morally worthy practices which we *ought* to perform, but which, if we were obliged to undertake would undermine our capacity for rational judgement and action.³⁴ The particulars of human subjects are not ahistorically given but are the result, of "friendship, love, solidarity and relationships such as obligations as well as ... self-interest."³⁵ We are, Pateman insists, not obligated by some external political fiat to forbearance and solidarity, but by our humanity, by the nature of our being as interdependent, embodied, and productive creatures.

Throughout her work, Pateman demonstrates a strong commitment to the power of environment to shape and maintain personality structures. This builds a view of human nature as extremely malleable, even determined by environmental, social and economic,

³³ Carole Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2002).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

conditions. Although the egalitarianism and universalism of modernity is revealed as deeply flawed by the liberal construction of its central categories, and Pateman leans towards differential citizenship, universalism is not erased from her thought. Despite claiming that the surface appearance of present democratic arrangements obscure clear knowledge of human nature, Pateman nonetheless draws upon deeper insights and commitments. Men and women all possess the capacities for independent and rational thought and action, and these capacities are nurtured or blocked by social and political structures. Her continuing, although generally understated, attraction to essences is particularly evident in her Presidential address to the IPSA, and in her work of property in the person.³⁶

In this region of the justificatory spectrum, *self* and *other* are not entirely separate, exclusionary, or opposed entities. Personal, social, and eventually species, inter-connectedness is a recurrent theme in Pateman's work. Productive, creative, and playful activity is undertaken both for those external goods they might contribute to, *and* for the sense of self which that activity confirms.³⁷ Erich Fromm offers us a way out of this conundrum of environmentally determined versus intransitive elements of human nature. At this extreme of the justificatory spectrum, Fromm openly grapples with human essence and a metaphysical account of human possibility. Where others tend to conceptualise human nature as a series of 'things', as distinct states or particular characteristics, Fromm conceptualises human nature as a philosophical problem, with deep psychological and social consequences. In effect, human nature is an ethical entity.

In his psychoanalytic practice, diverging sharply from Freud, he saw that the key to human psychology lies not in our biological drives, but in the fact that in addition to instincts we possess the specifically human traits of self-awareness, reason, and imagination. This leads Fromm to an examination of the contradiction between instinctual determination as a particular sort of animal, and our

³⁶ Pateman, "Democracy and Democratisation: Presidential Address: XVIth World Congress, IPSA.", Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

³⁷ See also Teske, *Political Activists in America*, 93-138.

intelligence and reason, such that "life becomes ... a problem which must be solved."³⁸ Our nature, he claims, is such that we have existential needs for meaning, for relatedness, effectiveness, a frame of orientation and devotion, that must be met to ensure our psychic survival.³⁹ These psychic needs can be met in any number of social and individual institutions and behaviours. The relative effectiveness of these various solutions is "tantamount to the difference between various degrees of mental health."⁴⁰ Some will lead to self-realisation of capacities and talents, others to emotional sterility and suffering. The forms in which these needs can be met are influenced and conditioned by the social environment into which we are born. The political and economic conditions which Fromm observed around him offered little, however, in the way of opportunity to develop unalienated, productive or sane solutions to the contradiction of our existence.

Fromm made a number of concrete suggestions intended to transform society, from a structure which encourages and inflicts powerlessness, to one which values and encourages active convictions and expressions of free creative will. This aspect of his work reveals his lack of political experience. He is unable to adequately identify, conceptualise and challenge the mechanisms of political power structures. This absence in his expertise also gives rise to the messianism that Maccoby objected to. A strident and optimistic voice, however, is a valuable resource in the political struggle for human self-realisation. In this struggle, as Fromm clearly shows, political democracy alone is insufficient to undo "the consequences of the economic insignificance" of people attempting to survive in unbalanced societies.⁴¹ Although he was under-equipped to prescribe for the political task of resistance to embedded political power, he was able to clearly identify the philosophical contradiction at the

³⁸ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 379. also Fromm, *Human Nature and Social Theory* ([cited]).

³⁹ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 68.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

heart of creative human being and its distinctively *political* implications. For instance, Fromm examines how work is an inescapable necessity for the human creature. Although, in producing our 'living' and our world we are able to partially emerge from our animal existence, work is more than biological necessity, it is also our liberator *from* nature, and our (self)creator as an independent being.⁴² This ideal is central to what, for Fromm, it is to be human. This involves the creative transformation of nature through self-realising activity in the individual control of creative acts, in production of necessities and of culture, the basis and the surroundings of human life.⁴³

Fromm thus draws our attention to the historically enduring productive ideal - a form which is the balanced realisation of the contradiction between our instinctual and our intellectual capacities. This nascent, emergent set of powers, refuses to disappear and provides our greatest hope for a fully human future. It is this potential which his concrete political prescriptions were designed to foster. Fromm observed, with Schumpeter, that citizens' thinking may well have become impoverished; but he further observed that, while thinking must precede effective action, "if one cannot act effectively - one cannot think productively either."⁴⁴ Fromm abhors these limitations, and their unhealthy effects on human flourishing.

My survey of the various exponents of participatory democracy theory have shown that accounts which avoid or overtly exclude a deep ontological aspect to their justification of participatory democracy are clearly found to be wanting. Theories which are less sceptical of ontology, at the essentialist end of the justificatory spectrum, particularly those which attempt to delineate the innate motivations and powers of the human subject, add explanatory depth

⁴² Ibid., 178.

⁴³ Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 187n, Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 178. For a discussion of Fromm's stance on mastering nature see Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and Its Radical Critics*.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 191.

to their theory of participatory democracy because they then have a firmer grasp of possible motivations and obstacles to those motivations. At the same time, however, they expose themselves to legitimate accusations of the worst excesses of essentialism, particularly irrational utopianism, and gender, race and class reification. In order to meld the spectrum of philosophical justifications for participatory democracy, to preserve the strengths of the various theorists, whilst avoiding their weaknesses, I propose that critical realist theory contains the ontological range and epistemological tools to enable us to make significant progress.

Critical realism is a philosophical system which insists on an ontological depth to reality, and subsequently, to explanatory accounts. Crucial to the task of applying these to participatory democracy theory is an understanding of its many key categories. In the following section, whilst setting out and analysing the key concepts of critical realism, I will draw upon and integrate those particular elements most appropriate to a theory of participatory democracy and a 'thick' conception of human nature. I will begin with critical realism's insistence on the value of ontology for knowledge gathering, and for human emancipation.

The Critical Realist Contribution

As I observed in the Introduction there are three key factors of a critical realist social science which may usefully be pressed to the service of a theory of participatory democracy.⁴⁵ Perhaps the most important of these is its re-introduction and conceptualisation of *ontology*. In seeking to know ourselves and the world in which we find ourselves we can employ our senses to give us visual, sound, smell, and touch data of the world. We can then gather these together to give us a picture of what is. Immediately we do this we have two distinct levels to our reality, the actual things which our

⁴⁵ On page 43. The three factors are ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgmental rationality.

senses perceive, and the accumulated body of knowledge which we share with each other in making sense of our day-to-day lives.

These levels of analysis are able to specify the many discrete interrelationships of the human, social condition, which can then be reassembled to a full picture of the world. The resulting assemblage of knowledge will not of course be the initial chaotic whole, but will be the "rich totality of the many determinations and relations" of human life.⁴⁶ The *process* of disassembling into rationally abstracted parts, and the re-assembling, itself provide us with a key to linking science to democracy. All citizens are in this respect scientists, as we attempt to make sense of the world in the pursuit of our own personal, family, work-place, and associational projects. A participatory democracy would engage 'more of us', and more of 'us', in deconstructing the causes of those structures, mechanisms, and events which obstruct and derail our personal and social projects, and prevent us leading fully human lives, and making rational judgements between the available, and imaginable alternatives.

Informing and affecting these 'realities' of empirical data and actual 'things and chaps' there is 'the real'. This is the ontologically prior field beyond our immediate sense experience, which nonetheless has very real concrete effects on our perceived reality. For critical realists the natural world most definitely exists, as do various social, economic, and cultural structures, independent of human intervention. These are not reducible in any simple way to a particular culture, human thought, or discourse. Natural and social phenomena are both linked by this underpinning realism to the concept of ontological 'depth'. As a consequence the idea of 'depth realism' emerges. Actual events are the manifest consequence of underlying structures, mechanisms, or causal powers which exert their own influence independently of conscious human intervention. Any mechanisms, structures or powers are assumed to be the product of,

⁴⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 100-01.

and emergent from, a deeper level of structure.⁴⁷ These emergent powers will react with each other and the world in diverse and open inter-relationships, personal, historical, social, and biological. Such structures or mechanisms are 'real' in that they actually and/or potentially have causal effects. These mechanisms may not, however, be directly empirically accessible.

Amongst these are the essential, emergent powers or mechanisms of human nature. This concept of mechanisms is important because it refers not to 'things' so much as to the processes which contribute to change and to persistence. The mechanisms which make up society are perhaps best imagined as existing in an interconnecting cascade of ontological levels. *The real*, connects together with *The actual*, that which we encounter, and thus to *The empirical*, our collected knowledge of the actual.

The real is intransitive, that is, it is relatively persistent and unchanging. To articulate the mechanism of this ontological 'persistence' to being, Collier utilises Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, an object's tendency to seek to maintain itself as a distinct entity.⁴⁸ Only in rational beings is this both a mental and physical process.⁴⁹ In his later, transcendental dialectical critical realist phase, Bhaskar sees the real as 'god', embodied contiguously in the human, the social, and the cosmic realms.⁵⁰ All existence thus shares a common core which it can come to be known, or realise. As well as having some striking parallels with Hegel's absolute, this also bears some similarities to Spinoza's monistic schema where God and his creation

⁴⁷ Sean Creaven, *Marxism and Realism: A Materialistic Application of Realism in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁸ Andrew Collier, *Being and Worth* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁴⁹ Benedictus de Spinoza and G. H. R. Parkinson, *Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2,21.

⁵⁰ Roy Bhaskar, *From East to West: Odyssey of a Soul* (London: Routledge, 2000), Mervyn Hartwig, "New Left, New Age, New Paradigm? Roy Bhaskar's from East to West," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 31, no. 2 (2001).

are a single substance.⁵¹ This single substance can have an infinity of attributes but the limited human intellect can conceive of only two of these, Thought and Extension in space.⁵² *The actual* and *the empirical* levels are transitive, as are Spinoza's Modes of thought and extension, i.e. they can change,⁵³ they interact with each other and in turn are acted upon by the real. Collier makes use of these Bhaskarian and Spinozist concepts to account for morality in its changing historical forms, whilst also cleaving to an ontologically prior moral category of 'worth' which both the natural and human worlds possess.⁵⁴ In this conception of the moral universe we are all born into an already 'moralised' world, but this morality is a mixture of actual morals, i.e. the ethic of that particular, historical moment, and of attempts to cleave to and realise the enduring morality of the worth of being.⁵⁵

The totality of our knowledge of human reality and of the moral reality of worth, of the social and natural world, is of as yet indeterminate depth. 'As yet' because all our knowledge remains fallible. Indeed, in *Dialectic: Pulse of Freedom* Bhaskar added the field of negativity to the ontological levels of reality. He posits the realm of negativity as the bulk of the universe. Absence is the status of the universe, which makes those moments of material, and human potential possible.⁵⁶ The fallibility of our knowledge is most especially the case in knowledge of human society, as this is necessarily an open system. Scientific knowledge always remains

⁵¹ Bhaskar's *Dialectic: The Pulse of freedom* is in large part a critical homage to Hegel's dialectic.

⁵² Collier, *Being and Worth*, 40.

⁵³ Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 399-400.

⁵⁴ Collier, *Being and Worth*.

⁵⁵ Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Verso, 1993), 259, Andrew Collier, *In Defence of Objectivity and Other Essays: On Realism, Existentialism and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵⁶ Bhaskar, *Dialectic*. He has also recently added the concept of meta-reality and a 'cosmic envelope' encompassing it all. Bhaskar, *From East to West*, Roy Bhaskar, *Meta-Reality: Creativity, Love and Freedom*, vol. 1, *The Bhaskar Series. The Philosophy of Meta-Reality* (New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 2002).

relative to human subjectivity. The conceptual resources of science, the categories and data of a scientific body of knowledge, will change as the result of the conscious activity of human beings. Theories will be found wanting and will be replaced, or as Dewey observed of human nature, they will serve particular purposes at particular times and then become redundant or even counter-productive. These are the fundamental insights of the pragmatist contributions to participatory democracy theory. Knowledge, theories, concepts, and ideologies are thus all transitive. The causal mechanisms themselves, however, are relatively intransitive objects.⁵⁷

As enquiring creatures we are necessarily limited by our senses and intellect. Within this limitation, however, we have managed to erect a huge and infinitely complicated epistemological existence for ourselves which to some minds, has come to constitute the entire meaningful human universe. Fromm observed, for instance, that this has an instrumental application, where we have gained a technological utopia of solutions to instrumental problems, but lost sight of human problems and solutions.⁵⁸ Bhaskar calls this *the epistemological fallacy*, where knowledge is taken to be the indicator of all that there is, resulting in the reduction of questions about what there is (ontological questions) merely to questions about what we can know (epistemological questions). The progressive dynamic of science flows from this latter, impermanent dimension, seeking to come close to the former. As science becomes the exploration of ever deeper levels of structure, progress consists in identifying causal mechanisms which then become the phenomena for which underlying mechanisms are sought.⁵⁹ Participatory democracy would share this, where the synergistic involvement of more and more people in more and more decision-making on the rightful objects of decisions, progressively fills human experience. Bhaskar argues, however, that

⁵⁷ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*.

⁵⁸ Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (London: Abacus, 1979), 171.

⁵⁹ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 183-84.

accepted scientific explanation only represents truth at the deepest, *current*, level.⁶⁰ He is not a relativist in any Kuhnian or postmodern sense, he is merely stating that in principle all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is fallible. Participatory democracy, as Dewey prescribes, will also itself be a pragmatic pursuit of better and better solutions in necessarily fallible conditions. Critical realism demands, however, that we must delve below the epistemological surface to the ontological depths of the social and natural world. The mechanisms we as scientists in a participatory democracy will then be studying may have very attenuated relationships to the surface phenomena we are accounting for.

Judgmental rationality

Some time has been expended here on rather esoteric philosophical and methodological issues because, I contend, they impact on the theory of participatory democracy. This impact is perhaps best grasped by considering the world in which participatory democracy must operate that this philosophy describes, and the world which participatory democracy seeks to realise, which the philosophy gives us a methodological window on. As human agents within societies we are seeking to come ever closer to our essence through knowledge of the productive mechanisms of our societies and our selves. We are both the object and subject of knowledge. This hermeneutic circle is generally considered a constraining limit in social science, but in participatory democracy, guided by the metaphysics of a critical realist perspective, it becomes a route to our self-emancipation. There will of course be a number of competing, contradictory, and radically different theories or explanations of the world at any one time. The choice between these competing theories, however, will have a rational basis due to the relative explanatory power of those alternative accounts.⁶¹ In the

⁶⁰ Roy Bhaskar, *Plato Etc: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution* (London: Verso, 1994).

⁶¹ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*.

day-to-day business of attempting to make human life better pragmatic judgements must be made. Whether this is a matter of deciding what is true or what is meaningful is of course a pragmatic question, to which pragmatists like Dewey and Barber would answer, the latter.⁶²

The counter-phenomenality of critical realism indicates that science, and by extension participatory democracy, may be a force for human emancipation.⁶³ All social structures, the economy, the state, the family, language, depend on or presuppose social relations. Whether they are between capital and labour, ministers and civil servants, or parents and children. It is those relations which can *either* reproduce or *transform* themselves. Critical realism's insistence on ontology directs our attention to these structures of social relations "both as the explanatory key to understanding social events and trends and as the focus of social activity aimed at the self-emancipation of the exploited and oppressed."⁶⁴ This concept tells of a necessarily social creature, and is an important element in thinking about what kind of democracy we should aspire to. How would this ontological schema assist in a conceptualisation of human nature or participatory democracy? Just as critical realist methodology utilises the concept of a stratified reality, human nature which itself is an embedded element of that same reality, will also have a number of inter-related facets.

Bhaskar expresses this in the concept of the 'four-planar social cube', in which, "four dialectically interdependent planes constitute social life, which together I will refer to as four-planar social being or sometimes as human nature."⁶⁵ These interdependent planes are identified by Bhaskar as: material transactions with nature; interpersonal, intra and inter-action; social relations including those

⁶² Dewey, *LW*, 12, Thayer, *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*.

⁶³ Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 10.

⁶⁴ Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, 4.

⁶⁵ Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 153-60. Originally the social cube in Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 128-32.

of power-over and constructive power-to, which can be natural, material and/or discursive; and intra-subjectivity.⁶⁶ This is, however, merely human nature at the level of the actual, 'the social cube you would meet in the super-market'.⁶⁷ Bhaskar initially talks of human nature at the level of the real, as grounded in biology, most particularly genetics.⁶⁸ This is in his early critical realist phase where he is concerned with the possibility of human natural science, with scientific methodology, although later in his meta-realism phase he talks of real, human nature as God(like).⁶⁹ I argue, however, that we need to recognise social, cultural *and* human *emergent properties*, as elements of 'real' human nature.

We live in a world where things happen as a result of things, people's, society's, and culture's inherent causal powers. When attempting to discover the truth of social phenomena with the method of critical realism the focus is the reason *for* things rather than truth as merely an account of *what* occurs.⁷⁰ Therefore, the 'is' of the social realities our deepening knowledge reveals, necessarily implies the 'ought' of addressing those conditions to better them.⁷¹ Human nature as represented by the 'social cube' begins to give us a framework with which to account for the reasons why particular results come about.⁷² As Fromm has shown though, in the development of a social character, the social influences working on us have their limits. We are not infinitely malleable. The social cube is necessarily set within the deeper levels of ontology of the real.

⁶⁶ Heikki O Patomäki, "Concepts of 'Action', 'Structure' and 'Power' in 'Critical Social Realism' - a Positive and Reconstructive Critique," *Journal for the theory of social behaviour* Vol.21, no. 2 (1991).

⁶⁷ The phrase is Mervyn Hartwig's. See Mervyn Hartwig, *What Scientists Tell Us* [Discussion List] (Bhaskar-List, 2002 [cited January 26, 01:37:34 2002]).

⁶⁸ Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London: Verso, 1986).

⁶⁹ Hartwig, "New Left, New Age, New Paradigm? Roy Bhaskar's from East to West."

⁷⁰ Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 203.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁷² Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 153-60. Originally the social cube in Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 128-32.

The preceding is-ought line of argument is all-important in seeking to justifying participatory democracy on the grounds of its goodness, its virtue. If we can establish a way of describing the outline of this virtue, in addition to its performative aspect, the 'is' of a working democracy necessarily leads to the 'ought' of democracy as a tool of self-realisation.

It is important to show that democracy, the 'least bad' form of government, is also, if it is participatory, the best for human beings. In Cole's account it is what ought to be, for the benefit of human flourishing and creativity. In Fromm's account it is what ought to be, for both social and individual mental health, in Pateman's for fully equal inclusion and social completeness. In Barber's version, participatory democracy would supply emotionally satisfying and securely stable community. For Dewey it is what ought to be for the pursuit of growth, in a society of pragmatic scientific intelligence gathering. In Mouffe's account, participatory democracy is what ought to be, for the living out of agonistic differences. The four-planar social cube merely acts as a rubric for analysis of the whole human agent in their situated position, rather than as an holistic, 'object' or ontological transcendent phenomenon. As such, in being referred to as 'human nature', it plays somewhat into the hands of those who pour scorn on the concept of human nature itself, such as Dewey, Barber, and Mouffe. The situated, and obviously relative and changeable quality, of this phenomenon seems to undermine reference to it as a concept of human nature, which suggests some form of intransitivity. Following Bhaskar's biological emphasis, a link into emergent powers would be a far less 'thing-like' way of looking at human nature, a way that is also far less relativistic while also preserving the important pragmatic insights of processual change and pluralistic embeddedness. There are, it is true, moments where the relativistic insights of post-modernism provide great analytical power, but it always comes back to 'reality'.

Up to this point the effects of causal social and structural influences seem to be taking all the burden of a description of human being. The vast mass of human behaviour is seen as socially relative and entirely socially created. The little bit that is human nature is

important - arguably very important - as it limits the areas and extent of our adaptability to social conditioning. *Some* acknowledgement of human nature is manifestly necessarily because, as Bhaskar observes, "it seems grossly implausible to suppose that human beings do not, qua human beings, share characteristics (such as purely physical ones!) which differentiate them as members of the same species from members of different species."⁷³

It is, however, a thoroughly thing-like and biological view of human nature Bhaskar outlines, which occupies a fairly small, though not insignificant place, compared to the thoroughly social and cultural norms of its manifestation. Our common nature "is never expressed in anything but thoroughly socialised, more or less historically specific and very differentiated forms."⁷⁴ Bhaskar insists that we cannot identify a common nature under 'psycho-socially meaningful conditions'. This of course leaves open the possibility of philosophical, or moral conditions. Although the transformational view of critical realism suggests that essential forms are themselves the products of previous transformations, "it should be noted that the transformational model of social action does not assert the non-existence of summative social universals."⁷⁵ The philosophical and moral view does, however, find the indication of expression in a footnote, where Bhaskar notes that the concept of a nature, and human nature in general, cannot be ascribed a material nature itself. It functions purely as a category, and acts as a place-holder that waits to be elaborated by substantive scientific descriptions.⁷⁶

Although this might be taken as describing human nature *purely* as an empty container filled with different contents by different cultures, an argument can be made that it is consonant with the concept advanced here of a 'thick' conceptualisation of human nature. The container will after all have distinct properties itself, of

⁷³ Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 208.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 208, n113.

depth, breadth, rigidity, and soundness. By this line of argument human nature can begin to be conceived of not as a thing but as a concept. This developmental idea is an innovation made by Fromm, and as has been observed, he described it as a contradiction or tension. Bhaskar himself suggests that, "although it is *not* itself human-historical in constitution... [human nature] licenses ... the suppositions of an existence of universal powers (and liabilities), certainly needs and very probably wants (and so interests)."⁷⁷ If emancipation is to be *of* the human species, rather than 'for' the people or 'by' them⁷⁸, the powers of the emancipated community must already exist in an unactualised form. They may only be present as powers to be able to acquire or develop powers, but it should never be forgotten that the world is not just the totality of what is actually the case, but includes what might or could be as well. If we are emergent from, but conditioned by, nature there is the possibility that human science could be of some use to us. Our ever deepening knowledge of the world as it is will help us to understand our limits and the mechanisms which affect our lives, that we might take as much control as is wise of our lives and environment, and place ourselves in a balanced position within it. Provided, of course that "we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to observe the new world through the critique of the old."⁷⁹ It may then be known in what direction and from where our self-realisation might emerge.

Whatever term might be used - causal mechanisms, emergent powers or ontological depth - what is unavoidably implied here is something like human nature. Critical realism attempts to describe the processes by which phenomena emerge. The social cube offers a descriptive schema, and the addition of 'emergent powers' offers a way of describing the processes of transformation in the human

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁷⁸ Anthony Flew, "Democracy and Education," in *John Dewey Reconsidered*, ed. R. S. Peters, *International Library of the Philosophy of Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

⁷⁹ 'Marx to Ruge' September 1843, cited in EW207

nature of the 'wo/man in the supermarket'. Sean Creaven develops this concept of emergent powers into a defence of what he calls 'emergentist Marxism'.⁸⁰ He draws upon Marx's categories of intelligence, self-consciousness, sociability and labour to delineate our species capacities as causal powers.⁸¹ Creaven, a student of Margaret Archer, shows how, just as the ontological levels of the stratified material world are irreducible to each other, each of them being defined by its possession of discreet autonomous causal properties and conditional effects, so too is human nature irreducibly stratified.⁸²

Our human powers, properties, or inherent mechanisms are emergent from one ontological level to the next, manifest in the ways particular to their time and place. High level mechanisms are rooted in, and emergent from, the lower ones. Higher aspects of reality may have evolved, however, as accidental by-products of lower level processes. Emergent powers are also capable of acting back on the materials out of which they arose. It cannot be infallibly predicted what will emerge, as this would be actualism.⁸³ What is being accounted for here, is the emergence of novelty. Even though no event or action exists before it occurs or is done "its agent and/or patient always does."⁸⁴

If political reality, the history of political struggles and change, were merely a succession of 'one damned thing after another' in a linear causal chain, then all we need to be able to progress is to resolve to do better things than we have done before. As was mentioned earlier, however, Bhaskar's *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* is centrally concerned with the concept of absence. In a universe made up mostly of absence or negative being, those positive

⁸⁰ Sean Creaven, *Marxism and Realism: A Materialistic Application of Realism in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 80-87.

⁸² Archer, *Realist Social Theory*, 14.

⁸³ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 115.

⁸⁴ Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, 9.

powers emergent from the sea of negativity, become of the utmost importance. Without negative being, positive being could not exist, and "the full implications traced through of this dialecticisation of ontology are very radical indeed, and presuppose a vision of the good society viewed as implicit in every human action or remark."⁸⁵ Societies and their political institutions, however, have inner structures with their own imperatives or conatus which by turn generate or constrain their powers. This necessarily changes our relation to political history to a consideration of what sort of things we want to do.⁸⁶ What sorts of things could we do in different structures? What is it about such and such a structure which prevents these?, and how should we transform that structure in order to transform our present position towards what we want, or to remove those impediments which prevent this?⁸⁷

In the assessment of participatory democracy theory, the various non-realisms subordinate theoretical criteria to the primacy of practice. Is it, however, practically desirable that theories be accepted or rejected on exclusively practical rather than theoretical grounds? This excludes the possibility of critiquing a practice for having false or contradictory premises even though it might, apparently, in the short term have 'meaningful' results. Theoretical attitudes can be reduced to *mere* attitudes and thus dismissed as mistaken, naive acts of imagination or utopian striving. Practices may certainly clash with other such practices, but they can not be argued about rationally without recourse to some foundational ground.⁸⁸ This is certainly the case with Mouffe and Barber. Theory is important because to excise theory or imagination from practice is to prune

⁸⁵ Roy Bhaskar speaking in, Christopher Norris, "Interview with Roy Bhaskar," *The Philosophers' Magazine* 1999.

⁸⁶ Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, 10.

⁸⁷ See J. M. Stewart, "Future-State Visioning; a Powerful Leadership Process," *Long Range Planning* 26, no. 6 (1993). For an interesting application of a similar approach in urban planning and regeneration. Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, 10.

⁸⁸ Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, 10.

away its emergent growing tip.⁸⁹ Theory can alter practice by bringing to light cognitive errors implicit in that practice, offering correctives, and by engaging the imagination in creative endeavour. To give primacy to practice is to make *existing* practice the judge of theory. This can only serve to protect and embed existing political practice.

Note must be made at this point of two non-emancipatory, non-participatory democratic reactions of an agent to the perceived problem of a blocked impulse: resigned apathy, or immersion in readily available, alienating, solutions. This brings to the fore Cole's emphasis on associations as corporate agents for individual, and by extension social, change. As such it highlights why Hirst's dismissal of Cole's Guild Socialism, and his alternate philosophy, devoid of cultural or social emergent powers or higher ontology, i.e. human nature, is mistaken. Actors within associations may be assigned roles, but, these actors are not determined by their official powers or structural positions. They can choose how they perform their allocated or chosen role. Joining a political party or an association does not determine an actor, nor does getting a job, nor being in a social class. By the same token social actors are not entirely free autonomous actors either. They are partially constrained by the limits of the social historical practices within which they find themselves, and by the limits of their human nature. Both of these limits can be transformed through active engagement, most particularly through an engaged participatory democracy. Human nature, however, is not, as has been observed, infinitely malleable.

A participatory democracy informed by an appreciation of the emergent powers of culture, the structures within it, and the limiting and enabling powers of human beings, will look rather different to our current attenuated, representative democracy. A tentative concrete utopian vision of such a participatory democracy can certainly be offered. Perhaps the more pressing task, however, is the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

development of some empirical operationalisations of our tentative conceptualisation of human nature. In any event, it is "possible to second-guess ... a massive change in four-planar human nature" that participatory democracy could bring about.⁹⁰ In the field of work particularly 'master-slave-type relations', the 'wagery' that for Cole was the main question of his day, and remains a deadening toil for many, would be done away with. This would sweep before it the deep human alienations which result from the subordinated and partial lives associated with much paid labour. In productive activity human beings, uniquely, produce not only their subsistence but also their culture and their being. The social arrangements of human production, will thus interact with human nature. The specific emergent powers of social arrangements of production can be in, at best harmonious, dialectical tension with human emergent powers. At worst, however, they will be in direct antagonistic or negative tension with them. Humanity must develop social arrangements of production in which the satisfaction of human needs are not accidental, as they are in so many of today's work environments. Bhaskar is keen to see a vastly expanded range of reciprocal constitutional rights, "which are precisely freedoms".⁹¹ He also calls, rather blandly, for "as much local autonomy and participatory democracy (precisely collective self-government) as would be consistent with ... the massive redistribution, transformation and limitation of resource use dictated by considerations of equity and ecology alike."⁹² The tension between the massive redistribution and the freedoms of humanised work will be great, but the bias must be towards the human powers which gain unique expression in work.

The use of basic income, which Fromm, Cole, and Pateman argue so strongly for, and Barber's *Service Corps* would together begin to enable what Bhaskar imagines as a "normative order ... based on

⁹⁰ Bhaskar, *Dialectic*, 266-67.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁹² *Ibid.*

trust, solidarity and care, if not indeed love".⁹³ Freed from the necessity of selling one's labour for subsistence' sake, a space would be opened up for the development of this normative order.⁹⁴ This could be developed in conjunction with a socialised market and 'caring duties' in return for basic income, as Elson suggested,⁹⁵ and as some European activists suggest in connection with the so-called 'Third Sector'.⁹⁶ Any creeping imposition of preconditions of entitlement to basic income would, however, undermine its humanist and democratic thrust. Any such socialised market in 'caring' work, could be funded through a Tobin Tax.⁹⁷ In connection with this measure, Elson makes a great deal of the secrecy of information as part of the problem of un-socialised markets. Dewey, and Barber too are much animated by the paucity of information available to citizens through which to ground rational decision making. The systematic skewing of information by un-socialised markets needs to be brought to the service of human essences rather than the negative absencing service of capital's emergent powers. Cottrell & Cockshott have done work on this, especially in regard to the speed of computing ability.⁹⁸ The prospects for open access to information has of course been greatly expanded by broadband access to the internet, and indeed there is currently much activity around the possibility of alternative,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Pateman, "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person."

⁹⁵ Here he refers to Diane Elson, "Market Socialism or Socialisation of the Market?," *New Left Review* 1, no. 172 (1988).

⁹⁶ Helmut K. Anheier and Centre for Civil Society (London School of Economics and Political Science), *The Third Sector in Europe: Five Theses, Civil Society Working Paper ; No. 12* (London: Centre for Civil Society London School of Economics and Political Science, 2002), J Bucek and B Smith, "New Approaches to Local Democracy: Direct Democracy, Participation and the 'Third Sector'," *Environment and planning C* 18, no. 1 (2000), C. Ranci, "Democracy at Work: Social Participation and the 'Third Sector' in Italy," *Dædalus* 130, no. 3 (2001).

⁹⁷ See Patomaki for a critical realist view on the Tobin Tax, Heikki O Patomäki, *Democratizing Globalization: The Leverage of the Tobin Tax* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

⁹⁸ Paul W. Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, *Towards a New Socialism* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1993), Allin Cottrell and Paul W. Cockshott, "Calculation, Complexity and Planning - the Socialist Calculation Debate Once Again," *Review of political economy* 5, no. 1 (1993).

local, and electronic currencies.⁹⁹ The role of gift economies might usefully be explored in this connection.¹⁰⁰ In such a society education in a creative flourishing of the arts and sciences would be at a premium. It would, in essence, consist of a continually *reflexive learning process*, appropriate to a transitional dialectical rhythm, directed towards the goal of human self-realisation.

All these would be useful areas for study of the diversity of association and innovation which is and could be pressed to a participatory democratic society. Each of these innovations and studies would contribute to an environment suitable for human needs, capacities, and powers described in the body of this thesis. As mentioned earlier, perhaps more importantly, some empirical investigation of the concept of a stratified human nature should be undertaken. As the paradigm for a participatory democracy itself, and as an eminently suitable methodology for such a project, the critical realist concept of a depth inquiry would seem to be appropriate.¹⁰¹ The involvement of those people most in need of a participatory, emancipatory democracy in a paradigm form of participatory democracy itself, must be sensible and ethical. Participatory action research seems the most fruitful established social science methodology for such a task, informed of course by critical realist stratagems.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Mohamed Ariff, "Islamic Banking," *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature* 2, no. 2 (1988), Richard Douthwaite, *The Ecology of Money, Schumacher Briefing* (Devon: Green Books: Schumacher Society, 2000), Richard Douthwaite, *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies for Security in an Unstable World* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1996), Thomas H. Greco, *Money: Understanding and Creating Alternatives to Legal Tender* (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Pub., 2001), Bernard A Lietaer, *The Future of Money: A New Way to Create Wealth, Work and a Wiser World* (London: Century, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988), Lietaer, *The Future of Money*, Chapter 6, 179-212.

¹⁰¹ For Depth Inquiry see Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, Chpts. 2 & 7.

¹⁰² Britt-Marie Berge and Hildur Ve, *Action Research for Gender Equity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), Merrelyn Emery, *Searching: The Theory and Practice of Making Cultural Change* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999), Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds.,

Critical realism offers us an instance of bringing ontology back in to social theory generally, and democratic theory particularly. Ontology gives us a window on the realm of the real beyond our immediate knowledge. The core of the theory of participatory democracy is the human subject, and we need more and better knowledge of that subject in order to design better political institutions, but also to develop the self-realisation of ourselves within those political institutions. This must be grounded in an unabashed naturalism, in that there is a human nature, and the fuller body of knowledge we have of it the better. The better for us and for the rest of nature, for as Collier has shown, ontological intransitive morality spreads to all of being.¹⁰³ Humans are in a unique position amongst being in that they are reflexively self-aware. As Fromm stated we may not be wholly in nature, but we are of it.

Humans, as does all being, have a tendency to persist in their being. This *conatus*, it is hypothesised here, will be given form by various essential properties, emergent powers, or mechanisms unique to each stratum of ontology. These are termed by critical realism, the epistemological, the actual, the real, and lately the meta-real. A progressive conceptualisation of our nature, articulated as 'thingness' will present us with categories of essence such as creativity, production, sociality. In the case of the essential nature of human beings, the indispensable subject of participatory democracy, we need solid awareness of these emergent properties, powers, or mechanisms, however we name them, that we might become all that we can, to lead fully-human existence in harmony with all of being. Theories of participatory democracy that are not able to openly come to terms with this naturalist realism are empty; those that implicitly hold a 'thin' conception of it are half empty. Those that honestly attempt to grapple with knowledge of our essential nature are, at least, half full.

Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000).

¹⁰³ Collier, *Being and Worth*.

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Appendix A

Port Huron Statement

Students for a Democratic Society, 1962 (excerpt): from Jacobs, Paul, and Saul Landau. *The New Radicals: A Report with Documents, Sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.

"In a participatory democracy, the political life would be based in several root principles:

- that decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings;
- that politics be seen positively, as the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations;
- that politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community, thus being a necessary, though not sufficient, means of finding meaning in personal life;
- that the political order should serve to clarify problems in a way instrumental to their solution; it should provide outlets for the expression of personal grievance and aspiration; opposing views should be organized so as to illuminate choices and facilities the attainment of goals; channels should be commonly available to related men to knowledge and to power so that private problems -- from bad recreation facilities to personal alienation -- are formulated as general issues.
- The economic sphere would have as its basis the principles:
- that work should involve incentives worthier than money or survival. It should be educative, not stultifying; creative, not mechanical; self-direct, not manipulated, encouraging independence; a respect for others, a sense of dignity and a willingness to accept social responsibility, since it is this

experience that has crucial influence on habits, perceptions and individual ethics;

- that the economic experience is so personally decisive that the individual must share in its full determination;
- that the economy itself is of such social importance that its major resources and means of production should be open to democratic participation and subject to democratic social regulation.

Like the political and economic ones, major social institutions -- cultural, education, rehabilitative, and others -- should be generally organized with the well-being and dignity of man as the essential measure of success.

In social change or interchange, we find violence to be abhorrent because it requires generally the transformation of the target, be it a human being or a community of people, into a depersonalized object of hate. It is imperative that the means of violence be abolished and the institutions -- local, national, international -- that encourage non-violence as a condition of conflict be developed.

These are our central values, in skeletal form. It remains vital to understand their denial or attainment in the context of the modern world....”

Appendix B

Example of a possible multiple-choice ballot paper

A Proposal to Create and Maintain Abortion Clinics with Public Funds

1] YES - I strongly support the public funding of abortion clinics.

2] YES - I support the principle of public funding of abortion clinics, but I am concerned with the character and intensity of the arguments against the proposal and suggest proceeding with caution.

3] NO - I am strongly opposed to abortion clinics on principle and am equally opposed to public funding of such clinics.

4] NO - I am opposed to the proposal to support abortion clinics from public funds in the way it is formulated here, but I am not necessarily opposed to abortion clinics in principle. I suggest the proponents reformulate and resubmit their proposal.

5] NO - I am opposed to the proposal because, although I am not personally against the public funding of abortion clinics, I do not believe the community can afford to take a decision until there is more debate and deliberation and until the two sides understand one another better. I therefore suggest postponement.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 286.