

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: THEORY AND MODELS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the subject of participatory democracy in the light of the basic insufficiency of representative democracy to adequately formulate or define a Rousseauian “general will.” The ontological bases of participatory democracy are explored, namely as they appear in the thought of Rousseau, Marx and Chomsky. Each of these authors takes a different approach to the topic, but each sees the necessity of participatory democracy emerging out of the inherent qualities of human beings, and as a manifestation of human freedom. A critique of representative democracy is generated, focusing primarily on the concept of representation itself. The second part of the thesis looks at historical and proposed models of participatory democracy, and takes the position that, to exist in the modern world, the institutional structure of participatory democracy would have to assume the form of the pyramidal council model.

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Part One

Why participatory democracy?

Enlightenment values and principles posit human freedom as a (if not *the*) supreme good. As well as being the fundamental ontological condition of human beings, the notion of freedom is regarded as an end or *telos* towards which the world is moving. This is the definition, more or less, of progress. As Hegel said in the *Philosophy of History* (§ 21), “The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom.” As a corollary to this assertion, we must further admit that certain important consequences follow from Hegel’s concept of “objective mind”; namely that progress towards freedom is not merely a subjective or personal development, but rather an intersubjective or social unfolding of the notion of freedom as it is embodied objectively in concrete human institutions, such as morality, civil society and, most importantly, the State.

There should, therefore, be little debate that, in line with classical political analysis, in the context of a free society composed of formally equal, rights-bearing individuals, we should expect some form of democracy to prevail, or at the very least to be the dominant element in a mixed constitution. Regardless of the variety of institutional arrangements that might result therefrom, it is fairly uncontroversial to assert that the popular element, even if not institutionally dominant, will be of the utmost importance to understanding such a polity. We could make the argument that a polity might have freedom, and not be democratic; but such an argument would have to concede that in a

society such as described, this state of affairs would probably be the exception to the rule that requires thorough explanation. This topic is complex and must be dealt with later.

This thesis also makes the assumption that Enlightenment principles, namely freedom and progress, are part of a universally shared discourse and system of thought. Naturally, this is not necessarily the case and this assumption can be rejected. Moreover, the values and principles of the Enlightenment can be admitted as such, yet themselves rejected *qua* values and principles. Either of these rejections means that any statements made here about participatory democracy, some of which necessarily follow from the logic of the arguments put forward, would be invalid or defective. That participatory democracy should somehow follow either as a necessity of human species-being, or from the logic of historical development, or from innate needs stemming from our cognitive capacities, will seem a weak and easily shattered thesis if there are initially no shared premises.

This is, therefore, a discussion that takes place, and which can only take place, in the context of the mainstream ideology of liberal discourse; that is, Enlightenment values and principles are assumed as shared premises. From a Marxist perspective, we can say that the ideological claims of bourgeois society are taken at face value. This means that we assume that the society which provides the context for this discussion – Western, liberal, capitalist society – has not by and large rejected the very values and principles it claims to uphold. And yet, it is not difficult to observe a certain stagnation in liberal democracies in terms of the external objectification of human freedom in real institutions and structures, specifically with regard to those institutions and structures of democracy. Indeed, in those historical instances where institutional structures of political governance

have arisen which have the appearance of greater substantive democracy, circumstances developed that stopped and even reversed the forward march of democratization. And so, has the development of democracy reached its zenith in the form of representative parliaments? Have we, in the words of Francis Fukuyama, reached “the end of history”? Or has the evolution of democratic governance “stalled” for other reasons? As stated earlier, we do not accept the idea that the mass of society has rejected the Enlightenment; therefore this apparent historical stagnation we have reached exacts an accounting.

Thus, Part One of this thesis deals with the philosophies that underlie the discourse of proponents of participatory democracy, provides definitions of the subject matter and presents an overview of the history of the debates on the subject of how human freedom must be realized in institutional arrangements. The recurring theme throughout Part One will be the dichotomy between the ontological conditions of humanity and the concrete political forms under which people actually live, while the basic insufficiency of representative democracy as a mode of realizing human freedom is demonstrated, and explanations put forth about why and how alternatives have been rejected or defeated in the past. Part Two consists of an overview and a critical evaluation of the concrete institutional arrangements which participatory democrats have either organized in the past, or propose for the future, and which stand out for various reasons. Taking Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a point of departure, this section draws primarily, but not exclusively, on socialist and anarchist literature. The goal in Part Two is mainly to examine the nature of any intellectual consensus that may exist about the direction activists should take in order to improve or replace existing political structures.

Definition and object of investigation

We must at this point establish a working definition of participatory democracy, and identify the object of investigation. The latter issue will be discussed first, and afterwards we shall hazard a definition of the subject matter. For first of all, we must show what kind of participatory democracy we have in mind, and what it is exactly that we are going to inquire into. For ‘participatory democracy’ is a broad topic, and putting limits around the object of investigation will allow us to circumscribe the discussion so that it does not range too broadly. Specifically, the idea here is to narrow the range of the investigation of the various forms of organization to which the qualification of participatory democracy could apply.

We could, for instance, talk about participation and democracy within industry or the workplace. This would lead to a discussion of concepts such as workers’ self-management, co-determination, or workers’ control of industry. We could launch into a discussion of board governance reform for various types of organization, or of participatory control of universities, or of reforming the democratic structures of political parties, labour unions, or other popular organizations to make them more responsive to the will of their membership. These would all make for worthy discussions, but the sphere of investigation of this paper is perhaps more ambitious; for the object of investigation here is participatory democracy at the political level – that is, at the level of the *state* – and the institutional structures that would make participatory democracy possible. This is not to say that the conclusions we arrive at could not be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to smaller groups or lower-level human organizations, but that the goal simply

is to investigate the possibility of participatory democracy at the highest level of human social organization, the state.

As for a definition, one set of authors offers the following:

It seems that participatory democracy connotes two broad features in patterns of decision-making: (1) *decentralization or dispersion of authoritative decision-making*, whereby the authority to make certain decisions is to be displaced downward from remote points near the top of administrative hierarchies or outward from central geographical locations, thus bringing authority closer to the people affected by it; and (2) *direct involvement of amateurs in the making of decisions* (Cook and Morgan, p. 4, italics in original).

Cook and Morgan are not using the term “amateurs” here in a disparaging way.

They simply mean people who are laypersons, not professionals or formally trained experts. They continue:

In sum, we shall broadly apply the term “participatory democracy” to those decision-making structures that adhere to basic democratic procedural norms, such as equality and majority rule, yet tend to extend equality by some sort of “grass-roots” decision-making of an authoritative nature. In other words, participatory democracy connotes decentralization of power for direct involvement of amateurs in authoritative decision-making (ibid.).

One key idea here is that participatory decision-making is *authoritative*; that is, that the decisions made by the grass-roots participants have actual political power, and an imperative force on those persons or agencies that will carry out the decisions. In this respect, participatory democracy is a far cry from the various types of public consultation that modern governments carry out, whether by duty or out of expediency – consultations which are often ignored when they yield an undesirable political result.

Combining now our definition of participatory democracy with the object of our investigation, the State, we arrive at the following working definition: *A type of political*

organization in which institutional structures exist to permit and promote the participation of all citizens in authoritative, collective decision-making, such that these decisions are binding on the agencies of the state that execute or implement them. It need not be explicit that the institutional structure of such an organization would necessarily entail the dispersal or decentralization of decision-making power, but it will be shown later how this is in fact the case. It will, furthermore, be shown that an important aspect of participatory democracy is the more relevant participation and voice of those people more affected by a given decision, but this aspect is not vital for our working definition. This is an aspect of equality, and what equality means in the context of collective decision-making; it will be discussed later.

It should also be noted here that the term “state” is used in the classical sense (or Rousseau’s sense) of a polity, or a political body; the organization of the highest power or authority in a human community. It is not meant to be interpreted in the Marxist or anarchist sense of the ‘capital-S’ State that is by nature an oppressive institution of coercion and class rule. The idea here is that even in the absence of the State, some human organization, or network of organizations, would probably exist to carry out collective action and permit collective decision-making. For the purpose of simplicity, I shall call such an organization a *state* (with a lower-case ‘s’) in spite of those intellectual traditions that might question whether any such organization is necessarily a *State*.

Opposing theories

In the 1960s, the idea of political participation became popular, especially with students, yet among political theorists the prevailing doctrine is one in which the concept

of participation plays only a minimal role. This doctrine is so prevalent among scholars that it merits the title that Carole Pateman granted to it, the “orthodox doctrine” (Pateman, p. 3). In fact, the orthodox doctrine of democracy often emphasizes the dangers inherent in widespread popular participation in politics, and these writers tend to reject the so-called ‘classical theory’ of democracy. The picture drawn by political sociologists and theorists is one in which the democratic citizen of classical theory is hopelessly unrealistic, given the lack of interest and political passivity of the lower socio-economic status groups (Pateman, pp. 3-4). Pateman points to the decline of the classical formulation of democracy, and the rise of the orthodox doctrine, as being due in large part to the following factors:

The collapse of the Weimar Republic, with its high rates of mass participation, into fascism, and the post-war establishment of totalitarian regimes based on mass participation, albeit participation backed by intimidation and coercion, underlay the tendency for ‘participation’ to become linked to the concept of totalitarianism rather than that of democracy. The spectre of totalitarianism also helps explain the concern with the necessary conditions for stability in a democratic polity, and a further factor here was the instability of so many states in the post-war world, especially ex-colonial states that rarely maintained a democratic political system on Western lines (Pateman, 1970, p. 2).

Furthermore, investigations into political attitudes and behaviour by empirically-oriented political sociologists undertaken in the post-war years revealed:

[T]he outstanding characteristic of most citizens, more especially those in the lower socio-economic status (SES) groups, is a general lack of interest in politics and political activity and further, that widespread non-democratic or authoritarian attitudes exist, again particularly among lower socio-economic status groups. The conclusion drawn (often by political sociologists wearing political theorists’ hats) is that the ‘classical’ picture of democratic man is hopelessly unrealistic, and moreover, that in view of the facts about political attitudes, an increase in political participation by non-participants could upset the stability of the democratic system (ibid., p. 3)

Pateman therefore cites the conclusion of these thinkers, stating that “limited participation and apathy have a positive function for the whole system by cushioning the shock of disagreement, adjustment, and change (ibid., p. 7).” The orthodox theory of democracy then, envisages a set of institutions in which the political method is limited to the competition among elites for votes in periodic free elections.

Elections are crucial to the democratic method for it is primarily through elections that the majority can exercise control over their leaders. Responsiveness of leaders to non-élite demands, or ‘control’ over leaders, is ensured primarily through the sanction of loss of office at elections; the decisions of leaders can also be influenced by active groups bringing pressure to bear during inter-election periods. ‘Political equality’ in the theory refers to universal suffrage and the existence of equality of opportunity of access to channels of influence over leaders. Finally, ‘participation’, so far as the majority is concerned, is participation in the choice of decision makers. Therefore, the function of participation in the theory is solely a protective one; the protection of the individual from arbitrary decisions by elected leaders and the protection of private interests. It is in its achievement of this aim that the justification for the democratic methods lies (ibid., p. 14).

Pateman fills much of her book *Participation and Democratic Theory* with an opposing, participatory view of democracy. Her theory of democracy is developed out of the work of such thinkers as Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and G.D.H. Cole; it encompasses the extension of democratic decision making from the political to the economic sphere. However, before launching into an exposition of the actual content given in, and emerging from, the concept of ‘participatory democracy’, it is necessary first of all to examine certain core thinkers on the subject whose important contributions lie in what I shall call ‘ontological arguments’. By this term, I mean that these writers derive the need for, the necessity, and the importance of participatory democracy from human nature or human species-being. Rather than being focused on instrumental arguments for

participatory democracy (i.e., that it accomplishes certain goals, for instance), the idea is that participatory democracy corresponds to something essential about what human beings are as individuals and social beings, which they therefore require in order to realize themselves fully as individuals in society. It expresses the real inner content of essential humanity, whereas other forms of political organization are, in this respect, false. They can be construed as somehow a denial or misrepresentation of the aforesaid human essence. These ‘false’ forms of political organization emerge only in the context of a denial of essential humanity, in conditions of constrained freedom.

The three thinkers we shall examine have different approaches to uncovering the connection between human essence and political organization. But we hope to show in the analysis that there are in fact similarities in each thinker’s basic premises. These theorists are representative of the most important approaches, or schools of thought, regarding participatory democracy: liberalism, Marxism, and anarchism. Thus we shall examine the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, and Noam Chomsky, respectively.

Rousseau, human nature and *The Social Contract*

“Man was born free,” writes Rousseau, “and he is everywhere in chains.” The depth of the paradox is noteworthy, especially considering how often it is overlooked. What is Rousseau getting at with this statement? What does it mean to be “born free”? For clearly, in the 18th century, most men were not born free. Laying aside Rousseau’s gendered language – for it went without saying that patriarchal social relations were

somehow natural, that women were and ought to be subordinate to men – we must yet analyse the nature of this paradox that he used to characterize the human condition.

The statement has two parts; the first is about men being born free, the second says they are not free. As for the first assertion, in the 18th century most men (keeping here to Rousseau's gendered language) lived under some form of restriction of freedom, whether under despotic government, or by having been born into an unfree condition, such as slavery or serfdom. The second part of the statement is a statement of fact about the world. Does it plainly contradict the first part? Not if we understand the different types of assertion Rousseau is making about human life. "Men are born free" is not a statement about actual freedom prevailing in the real world; it is a statement about human nature, about the kind of creatures that human beings (or at least, for Rousseau, *men*) are in essence. It is an ontological assertion, juxtaposed to a statement of political fact. The form of the sentence is that of an intellectual paradox; the content of it is a political thesis.

The natural condition of human beings, the condition that expresses the essential quality of humanity, is freedom. Human beings, however, living in civil society, are quite plainly not free. How did this contradictory situation come about, with the mass of humanity living in a condition that violates what is natural and essential to human life? Rousseau pleads ignorance on this historical cause of this. His primary concern is "How can it be made legitimate?" By this question Rousseau means to ask how human beings can live in civil society and yet retain their natural freedom. How can we order ourselves politically, yet still live in a way that corresponds to human nature, to freedom?

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau defines freedom as obedience to a law one prescribes for oneself (p. 65). Whether we agree with this definition or not, we are left with the problem of what the content of such laws will be. In civil society, for laws to truly be laws – that is, to be a manifestation of essential human freedom – they must emanate from the general will. Laws, being a product of the general will, will always be conducive to the common good (p. 69), which is their end and goal. But of what does this common good consist? Rousseau believes that a well-governed state tends to increase in population (p. 130); this may be a statistical indicator that the common good is achieved, but tells us little about what the common good is. Self-governing *citizens* will have a different perspective from that of ruled *subjects*, and Rousseau writes, for instance:

Subjects prize public tranquility; citizens the freedom on the individual – the former prefer security of possessions, the latter security of person; subjects think the best government is the most severe, citizens that it is the mildest; the former want crimes to be punished, the latter want them prevented; subjects think it is a good thing to be feared by their neighbours, citizens prefer to be ignored by them; the former are satisfied so long as money circulates, the latter demand that the people shall have bread (*The Social Contract*, pp. 129-130).

This only shows, however, that citizens who participate in the formation of the general will often have preferences different from those of subjects, who do not participate in legislation, but rather have laws imposed on them. Even assuming some flexibility in the outcome of legislative deliberation and the circumstances under which it occurs, we are left with the question of what innate tendencies, qualities, drives or needs will influence the outcome of the deliberations of a self-governing people. We have seen that the fundamental nature of human beings is freedom. But freedom, as self-legislation, might be better classified as a condition than as a nature. Therefore, what other qualities

can be attributed to human beings as ‘natural’ qualities that will determine how humans, in a condition of freedom, will govern themselves. Rousseau writes:

But so long as we have no knowledge of natural man, we shall wish in vain to ascertain the law which he has received from nature or that which best suits his constitution. All that we can clearly see on the subject of this [natural] law is that for it to be a law, not only must the will of the being it obliges be able to obey it consciously, but also, for it to be natural, it must be clearly spoken by the voice of nature (*Discourse on Inequality*, p. 70).

In discussing the further aspects of human nature, we should first of all note that Rousseau does not derive civil society from any innate human tendency towards sociability (p. 70). Unlike Aristotle, Rousseau does not see in man a gregarious animal. Rousseau is a modern liberal, not a classical philosopher. He agrees with Hobbes that humans are solitary animals in the state of nature. To recall what Aristotle said, it is quoted here:

I have now made it clear that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. He who is stateless by nature and not just by chance is either subhuman or superhuman, like the man reviled by Homer as ‘classless, lawless, hearthless’; for being naturally without a state, he is a lover of war and may be compared to an unprotected piece in a game of draughts (*Politics and The Athenian Constitution*, p. 7).

Furthermore, for Rousseau, human nature is not to be characterized by reason; for he asserts that in the state of nature reason would not be greatly developed as men would have no need of it. He identifies, by contrast, operations of the human soul that are more primitive and simpler than reason:

[T]he first gives us an ardent interest in our own wellbeing and our own preservation, the second inspires in us a natural aversion to seeing any other sentient being perish or suffer, especially if it is one of our kind. It is from the concurrence and combination that our mind is able to make of these two principles – without there being any need to introduce the principle of sociability – that all the rules of natural law seem to me to

flow; rules that reason is afterwards forced to re-establish on other foundations, when, as a result of successive developments, reason has succeeded in suffocating nature (*Discourse on Inequality*, p. 70).

The first principle of the mind Rousseau calls *amour de soi-même*, which is often translated as ‘self-love’. It is not to be confused with *amour-propre*, which is a sentiment that develops in civil society and is translated by at least one author (Maurice Cranston) as ‘pride’, and bears both the positive and negative connotations of that term. Pride is not a natural principle of the human mind, while self-love is, the latter being an instinct towards self-preservation and the maintaining of one’s wellbeing. The second principle is compassion, closely connected to self-love but extending to other creatures and individuals, which gives to human beings “an innate repugnance against seeing a fellow creature suffer (*ibid.*, p. 99).” Rousseau points out that Hobbes ignored this principle completely, but shows its vital importance when he says:

In fact, what are generosity, mercy and humanity but compassion applied to the weak, to the guilty or to the human race in general? Benevolence, and even friendship, correctly understood, is only the outcome of constant compassion directed towards a particular object; for is desiring that a person should not suffer other than desiring that he should be happy? Even if it were true that pity is no more than a feeling that puts us in the place of the sufferer, a feeling that is obscure but strong in savage man, and developed but weak in civilized man, what difference would this make to my argument, except to give it more force? In fact, pity becomes all the more intense as the perceiving animal identifies more intimately with the suffering animal. Now it is clear that this identification must have been infinitely closer in the state of nature than in the state of reasoning. It is reason which breeds pride and reflection which fortifies it; reason which separates him from everything which troubles or affects him. ... Although it may be proper for Socrates and other minds of that class to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would long since have ceased to exist if its preservation had depended only on the reasoning of the individuals who composed it (*ibid.*, pp. 100-102).

As we have seen, humans are not naturally sociable, but we can say that the principle of compassion contributes to any sociable tendencies that humanity develops over time. For Rousseau's view of human beings in the state of nature is in fact evolutionary. We can say that human beings do become sociable in time, but that this sociability is a secondary trait derived from antecedent mental principles, e.g., compassion and self-love. Furthermore, it is not reason that makes society possible, since reason makes individuals solipsistic and cold to natural compassion. This too is in contradiction to the classical view of the role of reason in society.

In addition to these two principles, as Rousseau calls them, he identifies two faculties that make up human nature. The word 'faculties' shall be used here to distinguish them from the aforementioned principles, but the idea is the same. It is these four traits together which make up human nature. The first of these faculties is free will, which Rousseau describes thus:

I see in all animals only an ingenious machine to which nature has given sense in order to keep itself in motion and protect itself, up to a certain point, against everything that is likely to destroy or disturb it. I see exactly the same things in the human machine, with this difference: that while nature alone activates everything in the operations of a beast, man participates in his own actions in his capacity as a free agent. The beast chooses or rejects by instinct, man by an act of freewill, which means that the beast cannot deviate from the laws which are prescribed to it, even when it might be advantageous for it to do so, whereas a man often deviates from such rules to his own prejudice. ... [I]t is not his understanding which constitutes the specific distinction of man among all other animals, but his capacity as a free agent. Nature commands all animals, and the beast obeys. Man receives the same impulsion, but he recognizes himself as being free to acquiesce or resist; and it is above all in this consciousness of his freedom that the spirituality of his soul reveals itself, for physics explains in a certain way the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas, but in the power to will, or rather to choose, and in the feeling of that power, we see pure spiritual activity, of which the laws of mechanics can explain nothing (ibid., pp. 87-88).

Thus it is not reason that elevates human beings above the other animals, for human reason and the reasoning power of animals are different only in degree. For Rousseau this quantitative difference is not a qualitative difference. Rather, humans differ from animals in being creatures endowed with free will, while animal behaviour can be explained through an understanding of deterministic physical laws. This introduction of spiritual substance to explain human behaviour may strike one as a kind of *deus ex machina* on Rousseau's part, that he is trying to evade the problem of describing human species-being with the old answer, ready-to-hand, of free will. It cannot be said that Rousseau upheld free will as a concept to ingratiate himself to the highly Calvinist citizens of Geneva, with whom he was seeking a rapprochement at the time he was writing the *Discourse*. Free will is in a sense an absolute concept in that it cannot be reduced to more minute concepts or phenomena; free will is not "composed" of something else. However, Rousseau's purpose is not to explain the phenomenon of free will; he assumes a shared understanding among his readers, and so allows himself to lean on the concept.

Human beings are also endowed with a trait Rousseau calls *perfectibilité*. This does not mean that human beings can achieve perfection in any way; it should rather be defined as a faculty for self-improvement (ibid., p. 33). Like free will, *perfectibilité* allows humans to rise above mere animal nature. *Perfectibilité* is a natural faculty that gives humans the capacity to create an existence beyond that given by the state of nature; it is an evolutionary capacity. Furthermore, this capacity manifests itself in human society as much as in the human individual. Rousseau describes it thus:

[T]here is one further distinguishing characteristic of man which is very specific indeed and about which there can be no dispute, and that is *the faculty for self-improvement* – a faculty which, with the help of circumstance, progressively develops all our other faculties, and which is in man inherent in the species as in the individual. On the other hand an animal at the end of several months is already what it will remain for the rest of its life and its species will still be at the end of a thousand years what it was in the first of those thousand years (ibid., p. 88).

Thus human beings are capable of transcending their condition in the state of nature, which explains how civil society could come about. Modern thinkers might call this faculty a capacity for cultural evolution, in the sense that human beings, while they have more or less attained the physical form and capacities that the species is likely to achieve, continue to evolve on a cultural level; that is, in terms of social organization, knowledge, development of material culture and means of production, and so forth. And so these last mentioned faculties, free will and self-improvement, represent a naturalization, or perhaps better an internalization, of two core aspects of Enlightenment thought: freedom and progress. Freedom and progress occur because they are given in the essential traits of human nature. The capacities are present inherently in the species, and time and circumstance are all that are needed to develop them. However much modern anthropology might take issue with Rousseau's intellectual exercise in deriving man in the state of nature, modern liberal thought is still indebted to him, and still arguing about the capacities that Rousseau was able to deduce regarding human nature – self-love, compassion, free will and *perfectibilité*. They remain, in some form or other, at the core of liberal ontology.

It must now be shown how these qualities of human nature imply that human beings require a participatory democracy. As we have seen, to be free means to somehow

live according to one's nature, in a way that is a manifestation of one's inner being, that permits and promotes the realization of one's inherent qualities. Rousseau never explicitly drew the connection between his *Discourse on Inequality* and *The Social Contract*, but in reading both texts closely, the connection becomes clear. Rousseau expresses his problem thus:

‘How to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before.’ This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract holds the solution (*The Social Contract*, p. 60).

The question is about how to organize civil society in a such way that the resulting political entity allows its members to be as free as they were prior to its founding. The social contract is Rousseau's solution, and it will be shown later in more detail how the political organization resulting from this social contract is what can be described as participatory democracy. Therefore we see that the primary objective of the social contract is twofold: (1) The common defense of each member's person and property (in short, his or her interests), and (2) the maintenance of individual freedom. We have seen that the latter consists of living according to nature, and we showed how human nature, for Rousseau, has four basic traits. How is the social contract conducive to each of these traits?

In terms of self-love, it is easy to see that the whole purpose of the social contract is to preserve the interests of the individual with the collective force of the community. This allows the individual to acquire more for himself or herself than would be possible in the state of nature, since a greater force is present to defend one's property and person.

Since the terms of the contract are set collectively, each with each, “it is in no one’s interest to make the conditions onerous for others (ibid, p. 60).” The whole point of the social contract is to preserve oneself and what one has acquired or can acquire. Thus, we see that self-love is served by the social contract.

Can the same be said about compassion? The rights that the individual acquires in forming a political organization with others, he also bestows upon those others. All are equal in the social contract, and all have a say in collective decision-making. In the process of this decision-making, the individual learns to aim at the common good, which is the interest or interests shared by all. Thus, partaking in the general will can mean that one is ‘wrong’ about what that general will is, especially if one confuses one’s particular interest for the common good. The process of arriving at any sort of social consensus is not an automatic one; it involves participation in public councils and assemblies. These meetings involve speaking and listening in turn, persuading others and allowing oneself to be persuaded in a process of collective deliberation. This contributes to the feeling that other members of the community have their own interests, feelings, thoughts; that, in short, they are all creatures like oneself. One comes to value them as equals, political compatriots and fellow human beings. In taking part in acts of legislation, the citizen learns to apply the Golden Rule to law-making, and understand the universality of the application of the law. As part of the general will, one wills for others what one wills for oneself, and one would not will for others what one would not will for oneself. Thus the social contract serves the compassionate aspect of human nature.

All of the individual’s acts of participation in the formation of the community’s general will are themselves acts of individual free will. This is especially true of the

original contractual act that creates the community out of the many different sovereign individuals that make up its body. The acts of public deliberation, which allow the community to arrive at and express the general will, involve the participation of all, even if only in the giving or withholding of one's individual assent to a law. As such, sovereignty as a collective act involves the expression of each member's free will, which is never alienated in the establishment of the social contract. While one can be mistaken about what the general will is, everyone gets a say in deliberating on it. The individual's will takes part in the general will, because it is the shared interests of the community that create it. Free will exists at the collective as well as the individual level. The demands of the political entity established by the social contract are themselves the creation of a set of unanimous free wills, and so these demands will not be so onerous as to deprive anyone of their freedom of choice in the sphere of private interests (see *The Social Contract*, p. 60).

Finally, the social contract is an expression of *perfectibilité*, the human faculty for self-improvement, in that the individual members can maintain their private interests, which are in fact aided and enhanced by membership in civil society. Here the force of all is united to protect and serve common interests, which must necessarily include self-development. This self-development is even more strongly manifested at the level of the collective, for as stated above, self-improvement is a faculty at the species level, as well as at the level of the individual. The general will under the social contract is the collective free will of the community, and this will always elects to promote the common good, which means the increasing of the capacities and powers of the community to make life better for all of its members and for itself, in ways that the community itself determines.

The product of this is a conscious, free and controlled social evolution that ameliorates the social life of the community and promotes the development of its members as individuals. This will be true so long as the general will dominates and is not subordinated to influential particular wills.

Thus we can see how the form of political organization that Rousseau describes in *The Social Contract*, which can easily be classified as a kind of participatory democracy, is the form that a political entity must take if it is to be conducive to human freedom. And as stated earlier, Rousseau understood human freedom as living in accordance with nature, which for the human species, means the four traits enumerated above. Participatory democracy emerges out of human attempts to organize themselves to maintain and promote freedom, where freedom means a life conducive to self-love, compassion, free will and *perfectibilité*.

Marx and the overcoming of alienation

In Marx's thought, the basic ontological postulate is the dialectic between humanity and nature. By this, it is meant that the essential condition that defines humanity is our mutually constitutive relationship with the natural world. Human life-activity acts on nature, which in turn creates the material conditions of social life in which human beings find themselves enmeshed. The activity of human beings on the natural world is labour. Labour, as the free, conscious production of the means of life through activity on the external, sensuous world, characterizes human beings as a species; labour is part of human species-being. The key here is that labour, when it is a true

manifestation of human species-being, is an expression of human freedom and consciousness.

Private property mediates the relationship between humanity and nature in such a way that the labour of one person is no longer the free and conscious production of that worker, now a wage labourer; but rather it is a product of the freedom and consciousness of another being, one who does not work, but who commands the labour of the worker, which confronts the worker as something alien. The labour process and its product cease to be a free manifestation of the worker's creativity. This condition is *alienation*, and it is the condition of the worker under a system of private property and wage labour. It ought to be noted here that contrary to conventional thinking, alienation is not a state of consciousness or a psychological state. Workers under capitalism may or may not *feel* alienated, and may define their sense of alienation, if they have one, as being of this or that quality or intensity. The point is here that this sort of sensed alienation is irrelevant. The Marxist concept of alienation is an *objective condition*.

In his 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx defines alienation (or 'estrangement', to translate differently) as being of a fourfold character. It consists of (1) estrangement from the product of labour, (2) estrangement from the labour process, (3) self-estrangement and (4) estrangement from others. It should be noted that private property is not the cause of alienation; rather, private property is the product of alienated labour, "of estranged life, of estranged man (Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 79)," and is the means by which labour alienates itself, "the realization of this alienation," as Marx puts it (*ibid.*). It is only through the radical negation of private property that the condition of alienation can be overcome. Human history can be seen as the history of the condition of alienation from

its genesis to its end, the culmination of which is a social condition Marx calls communism. He writes:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being – a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. ... [I]t is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution... The positive transcendence of private property as the appropriation of human life, is therefore the positive transcendence of all estrangement – that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his human, i.e., social, existence (ibid., pp. 84-85, italics in the original).

Marx did not think of communism as a type of state regime, as contemporary political terminology uses the term. Rather, it is an objective condition, or state of affairs, in which class society (and alongside it, the institutional manifestation of class society, the State) has been transcended. Alienation in all its forms has been overcome, primarily because private property in the means of production has ceased. But between capitalist society and communism there would seem to be an unbridgeable gulf. A thing cannot simply change into its opposite; a mediating factor is necessary. Thus, it is through political revolution that the established order is overthrown, the culmination of the class struggle under capitalism. The proletariat establishes itself as the ruling class and ushers in a transitional period between capitalism and communism, between class society and a classless society. From a socioeconomic standpoint, Marxists have often referred to this transitional period as socialism, or as a “lower stage” of socialism as opposed to the “higher stage” of socialism, i.e., pure communism. From the political standpoint, the

period of transition is referred to by Marx as the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. As Marx wrote in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*,

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat* (*ibid.* p. 538, italics in the original).

Again, clarification of the terminology is important as modern usage is deceptive. Marx, in using the term dictatorship, was focused on its classical meaning, not its modern one. “Dictatorship” implied – in Roman times, for instance – a temporary or transitional phase from one period of stability to the next. It was not meant in the current sense of a non-democratic regime that suppresses individual rights and freedoms. Furthermore, the term refers to the dictatorship of a *class*, not of an individual or ruling body. The dictatorship of the proletariat merely means that the standpoint of law and government is that of the working class. From this perspective, in classical times, oligarchy and democracy were both forms of class dictatorship; just as in modern times representative government with universal suffrage is also one particular manifestation of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The transitional period of socialism entails the proletariat organized as a ruling class, and the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply the form that this organization assumes. The precise form of this organization may differ at different times and in different places, but nonetheless the content remains the same.

All the writings of Marx on the subject indicate that he thought of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a form of transitional class rule in the most democratic terms, since democracy implies the rule of the poor majority, the proletariat and its allies. In a period where there is democracy, as well as complete class consciousness on the part of

previously subaltern classes, with the working class in the lead as a self-conscious class “for itself”, the result is that these groups constitute a ruling class. The bourgeoisie, still in existence, simply never gets its way in terms of its class interest.

Marx makes it quite clear that the form of state he has in mind is a vibrant popular democracy, in the classical or “participatory” sense of the term, such as the Paris Commune of 1871. He writes in *The Civil War in France* that the true secret of the Commune was that it was “essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour (*ibid.*, pp. 634-635).” This subject, including the details of the Paris Commune’s democracy, will be dealt with later on. The point here is that we have derived the necessity of such a democracy not merely historically, but ontologically; that is, as proceeding from the inherent species-being of humanity.

Chomsky: human intelligence and politics

In his Dewey Lectures (transcribed in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 60, No. 12, December 2013) entitled “What Kind of Creatures Are We?”, Noam Chomsky reveals no delusions that he can answer such a question definitively, but “that it should be possible to clear away some of the obstacles that hamper further inquiry, including some widely accepted doctrines with foundations that are much less stable than often assumed (p. 645).” He believes that his conclusions may have far reaching implications for cognitive science, specifically linguistics and the philosophy of mind – fields to which Chomsky’s scientific work has made vastly important contributions.

Pursuing his subject guided by the questions “What is Language?” and “What Can We Understand?”, he arrives at the assertion that language and thought “have many striking properties, for the most part hidden from direct observation and in important respects not accessible to consciousness.” The human capacities for thought and language are closely connected and inherent in our species, and if there are limits to what mind and language can express, there is no working theory that establishes such limits. The scope of the questions leave mysteries “that will resist the kind of understanding to which creators of the early modern scientific revolution aspired, as was recognized in various ways by the great figures of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought (p. 685).”

Thus human beings, in their capacity as thinking, communicative creatures, are gifted with a kind of “infinite power” of associating together the most diversified sounds and ideas. Language and consciousness may not be able to reduce themselves to thinkable and expressible models in a way human thought can comprehend; yet short of this perfect self-conception, human beings have a virtually infinite capacity for thinking and expression, and the capacity to make infinite use (in terms of the ability to conceive and grasp meaning) of finite means (the human brain and the sounds of language, see p. 650) makes humanity unique among all creatures. Yet language must remain a phenomenon that is not completely knowable and explicable for the simple fact that the human mind is largely mysterious. There is a difference between being infinite and being limitless; human thought is infinite, but not limitless, because it is an emergent property of a limited means of its production – the human brain. Our understanding of cognitive science can only be a disappointment, because the study of it seems to falsify “the exuberant thesis that the early scientific revolution and the Enlightenment provided

humans with limitless explanatory power (p. 682).” Mind and thought cannot, it seems be reduced to more atomistic concepts. Therefore, there can be no ‘grand unifying theory’ to link cognitive science and neuroscience, in the way that, for example, chemistry and physics can both be explained through shared theories about the natural world. This means that the phenomenon of free will cannot be dismissed as an illusion merely because the brain, being a material object, is subject to the determinacy of the natural world. Free will is another emergent property out of a finite means, an aspect of the infinitude of thought that emerges from the finite human brain. Chomsky states:

Despite much sophisticated commentary, it is also hard to escape the force of Descartes’s conviction that free will is “the noblest thing” we have, that “there is nothing we comprehend more evidently and more perfectly” and that “it would be absurd” to doubt something that “we comprehend intimately, and experience within ourselves” merely because it is “by its nature incomprehensible to us,” if indeed we do not “have intelligence enough” to understand the workings of the mind, as he speculated. Concepts of determinacy and randomness fall within our grasp, but if “free actions of men” that are “undetermined” cannot be accommodated in these terms, that could turn out to be a matter of cognitive limitations – which would not preclude an intelligible theory of such actions, far as this is from today’s scientific understanding (p. 682).

Despite the mysteries that remain about language and consciousness, the fact is that humans do not exist as isolated individuals; they are social beings, “and the kind of creatures we become depends crucially on the social, cultural, and institutional circumstances of our lives (p. 685).” Chomsky is thus led to inquire about what sort of institutional arrangements would promote, and be conducive to, the common good.

He begins from a seemingly obvious starting point. If we equate freedom with human development in its full diversity, it follows that any institutions that constrain such freedom are illegitimate unless they can be somehow justified (p. 686). Chomsky echoes

Marx in criticizing the effects on human beings of the modern division of labour, whose benefits and ill effects were originally observed by Adam Smith. Like Smith, Chomsky believes that “the more benign original passions of human nature” (ibid.) might compensate for its more pathological manifestations. Chomsky traces his own views to the tradition of “libertarian socialism” (p. 687). This he describes as a set of ideas that do not make up a fixed social system “with a definite answer to all the multifarious questions and problems of human life, but rather a trend in human development that strives to attain Enlightenment ideals (ibid.).”

This broad tendency in human development seeks to identify structures of hierarchy, authority, and domination that constrain human development, and then to subject them to a very reasonable challenge: Justify yourself. Demonstrate that you are legitimate, either in some very special circumstances at a particular stage of society, or in principle. And if they cannot meet the challenge, they should be dismantled. And not just dismantled, but also reconstructed, and for anarchists, “refashioned from below,” as Nathan Schneider observes in a recent commentary on anarchism (pp. 687-688).

Chomsky advocates a version of anarchism that opposes both capitalism and the overweening power of the state, of whatever type it may be. He supports, quoting Rudolf Rocker, “the planned administration of things in the interest of the community” and “wide-ranging federations of self-governing communities and workplaces (p. 690).”

Chomsky cites approvingly such anti-statist Marxists as Paul Mattick and Anton Pannekoek, as well as G.D.H. Cole’s guild socialism, and the participatory economics and politics of writers such as Michael Albert, Robin Hahnel and Steven Shalom. (The latter will be discussed further in Part Two of this paper.)

Yet it is very easy to see that compared to a more ideal society, one composed of free self-governing equals, the society we live in bears a “shrivelled conception of

democracy” (p. 697), one which is upheld by the supposedly liberal and progressive elite.

Chomsky provides a few instructive quotes:

The public are “ignorant and meddling outsiders [who] must be put in their place.” Decisions must be in the hands of the “intelligent minority [of] responsible men,” who must be protected “from the trampling and roar of the bewildered herd.” The herd does have a *function*. Their task is to lend their weight every few years to a choice among the responsible men, but apart from that their function is to be “spectators, not participants in the action.” All for their own good. We should not succumb to “democratic dogmatism about men being the best judges of their own interests.” They are not. We are: we, the responsible men. Therefore attitudes and opinions must be shaped and controlled. We must “regiment the minds of men the way an army regiments their bodies.” In particular, we must introduce better discipline into the institutions responsible for “the indoctrination of the young.” If that is achieved, then it will be possible to avoid such dangerous periods as the 1960s, “the time of troubles,” in traditional elite discourse. We will be able to achieve more “moderation in democracy” and return to better days when “Truman had been able to govern the country with the cooperation of a relatively small number of Wall Street lawyers and bankers.”

These are quotes from icons of the liberal establishment: Walter Lippmann, Edward Bernays, Harold Lasswell, Samuel Huntington and the Trilateral Commission, which largely staffed the Carter administration.

The roots of this elitist conception of democracy go back in US history to the Founding Fathers, whose plans for representative government were such as to keep genuine democracy at bay to the furthest extent possible. Like the classical philosophers they were schooled in, they had a conception of democracy as a kind of class rule; it was not rule by their class, so simply put, they were against it. In the late 18th century, these thinkers could be open and honest about wanting to avoid democracy, and their intention to set up a society in which property would be protected, with its rulers drawn as much as possible from the privileged class. Elites are much less open in the 21st century. Democratic values must be universally praised, just as they are universally reviled in practice.

Representation: the concept and its relationship to democracy

Having established what we mean by *participatory* democracy, we must point out that this concept is often applied in distinction and in contrast to *representative* democracy. The latter concept must be broken down as well. Together ‘representative’ and ‘democracy’ usually mean something like ‘a system of government involving representatives elected by universal adult suffrage.’ But what is a representative? What does representation involve? Who or what is represented? Representative democracy, in whatever version one may conceive, is an attenuation of democracy, an impure or mixed form of governance; this is the charge levelled at representative democracy by supporters of democracy in its participatory form. Participatory democracy, they hold, is democracy in its pure or true form, in a way that representation does not allow.

Some might object, seeing the true contrast not between the concepts of representation and participation as the modalities that should qualify democracy, but rather the binaries of *direct* and *indirect* democracy. The latter involves popular rule by means of representatives, granted; but they would argue that modern states which apply to themselves the term ‘democratic’ also often make frequent use of direct democracy. *Direct* democracy involves such activities as popular referenda, plebiscites, ballot initiatives, votes at town hall meetings, and the like. It is true that there is some conceptual overlap between direct democracy and participatory democracy; direct democracy involves a kind of popular participation in decision-making; participatory democracy, as most conceive it, would probably entail a great deal of exercises in direct democracy. However, they refer to different things, different ideas. Direct democracy is above all a kind of activity; participatory democracy is a mode of governance that may

involve many kinds of activities, activities that could be classified as direct and indirect democracy. Participatory democracy might even involve some level of representation, and representative democracy often displays some level of popular participation. Nothing is necessarily pure in its form. It is a question of what the dominant characteristic of a given phenomenon is, and what features are subordinate to the dominant characteristic. For the sake of simplicity, we shall denominate all modern states that are governed by elected officials chosen by universal adult suffrage as ‘representative democracies’, while the term ‘participatory democracy’ shall be reserved for systems that do not currently exist, that exist only in embryonic form, or that have been attempted in the past, the specifics of which will be dealt with later on. The basic idea of participatory democracy is that all citizens are able to take part in the institutionalized decision-making system.

For political theorist C.B. Macpherson, direct democracy is a difficult proposition due simply to the size of modern states. When Macpherson wrote *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (1977), the Internet was far off. But modern technology could easily make direct democracy more feasible – and indeed it already has to some extent – in terms of circulating petitions, launching ballot initiatives, and allowing governments to hold referenda and engage in public consultations. One issue, however, is who gets to decide on the agenda; that is, what group or institution will be charged with deciding what questions will be put to the public for direct-democratic decision-making. It is easy to conceive how the expression of what could be merely a casual preference for a policy on the part of a majority can yield oppressive results against the hard-won rights of minorities. Constitutional and legal safeguards would still be necessary, as would some sort of educational system that inculcated respect for minority and individual rights,

especially along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality and other forms of personal freedom. Macpherson maintains that the broadest questions could be the subject of popular referenda, but the hundreds of political decisions made by every society in the run of a year would still require some sort of representative government structure to make and carry out these decisions. Macpherson writes:

Popular initiative could certainly formulate clear questions on certain single issues, for instance, capital punishment or legalization of marijuana or of abortion on demand – issues on which the response required is simply yes or no. But ... popular initiative could not formulate adequate questions on the great interrelated issues of overall social and economic policy. That would have to be left to some organ of government. And unless that organ were either an elected body or responsible to an elected body, and thus at some remove responsible to the electorate, such a system of continual referenda would not really be democratic: worse, *by giving the appearance of being democratic, the system would conceal the real location of power and would thus enable 'democratic' governments to be more autocratic than they are now.* We cannot do without elected politicians. We must rely, though we need not rely exclusively, on indirect democracy. The problem is to make the elected politicians responsible. [Electronic technology] cannot do that (Macpherson, pp. 97-98, emphasis added).

A proper participatory democracy would, therefore, combine elements of direct democracy with electoral indirect democracy, with systems for keeping elected politicians responsible to their constituencies. Furthermore, it is not merely the deciding on an issue that is vital, but the process of deliberation that takes place that leads to a decision. Participatory democracy, in contrast to direct democracy, envisages the process of public debate, deliberation and (when necessary) compromise being extended to a broader public. Participatory democracy should be seen as a means of arriving at a social consensus, rather than a vulgar imposition of the unreflective will of a majority.

Here, however, we must concern ourselves with the concept of representation. Representation is a significant and widely used concept but there is rarely any discussion of its meaning. It is either taken for granted, or the complexity in the use of the term discourages close scrutiny. Political scientists will argue about the representativeness of various governments, and therefore their legitimacy, without having a clear concept of representation and its meaning. Even if we were to agree that representation has no fixed meaning, we would still be faced with the attempt to resolve what different people are talking about when they use the word. One author, for example, goes into the history of the word:

The concept of representation, particularly of human beings representing other human beings, is essentially a modern one. The ancient Greeks had no corresponding word, although they elected some officials and sometimes sent ambassadors – activities which *we* might say involve representation. The Romans had the word *repraesentare*, from which our own “representation” derives by way of Old French; but they used it to mean the literal bringing into presence of something previously absent, or the embodiment of an abstraction in an object (say, the embodiment of courage in a human face or a piece of sculpture). They did not apply it to human beings acting for others, or to their political institutions. Such uses began to emerge in Latin in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in English even later, as persons sent to participate in church councils or in the English Parliament came gradually to be thought of as representatives. Initially, neither the concept nor the institutions to which it was applied were linked with elections and democracy, nor was representation considered a matter of right (Pitkin, pp. 2-3).

Pitkin begins her study of the concept of representation by confronting the way Thomas Hobbes dealt with the subject in the *Leviathan*. She states that he develops a view that is “both temptingly plausible and peculiarly deficient. Because it is plausible, it has tempted other astute thinkers since Hobbes’ time and can tempt us as well. Because it is deficient, it can be used as a springboard into a more extended study of what

representation is and means (ibid., p. 14).” In Chapter 16 of *Leviathan*, entitled “Of Persons, Authors and things Personated”, Hobbes begins by defining what a person is. He writes:

A person, is he *whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction.*

When they are considered his owne, then he is called a *Naturall Person*: And when they are considered as representing the words and actions of an other, then he is a *Feigned or Artificiall person* (p. 217, italics in the original).

As the theatrical etymology of the term *persona* suggests, a person is thus a representer of some speech or action, whether on stage or in the legal sphere, “So that a *Person*,” Hobbes continues,

is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himself, or an other; and he that acteth another, is said to beare his Person, or act in his name... and is called in diverse occasions, diversely; as a *Representer*, or *Representative*, a *Lieutenant*, a *Vicar*, an *Attorney*, a *Deputy*, a *Procurator*, an *Actor*, and the like (pp. 217-218).

An actor who represents another does so by the *authority* of that person. Authority is the right of doing any action, which can be “transferred” to a representative, who acts on behalf of the represented. The latter is held to be the author of the act or speech of the representative, provided it was in the context of the agreement or commission that exists between the author and the representative.

For Hobbes, it is the violence and uncertainty of the state of nature that human beings should wish to avoid at all costs. This requires the erection of a “Common Power” to keep people “in awe, and to direct their actions to a Common Benefit (p. 227).” The only way to do this is for people

to conferre all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon one Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality of voices, unto one Will: which is as much to say, to appoint one man, or Assembly of men, to bear their Person; and every one to owne, and acknowledge himself to be the Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person shall Act, or cause to be Acted, in those things which concern the Common Peace and Safetie; and therein to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their Judgements, to his Judgment (p. 227).

Such an individual or assembly is thus made Sovereign, and to the sovereign has been given the right to present the person of all subjects, “that is to say, to be their *Representative* (p. 228).” Hobbes resorts to the historical fiction of the social contract to justify the permanent and unlimited power conferred on the sovereign. The will and authority of the sovereign, Hobbes holds, are derived from the wills and authorization of the subjects in the act of making the covenant that guarantees their well-being. If we deny the existence of such a covenant, then we can also deny the legitimacy of the absolute power of the sovereign over his or her subjects. Furthermore, as Pitkin writes:

Calling the sovereign a representative arouses other expectations in the reader which the Hobbesian system does not fulfill. When we look at the Hobbesian political structure as a whole we are most aware of how partial, formal, and empty of substance his concept of representation is. A sovereign given complete power in perpetuity, with no obligation to consult the wishes of his subjects and no duties toward them which they can claim – surely nothing could be farther from what we ordinarily think of as representation or representative government! We read the *Leviathan* and feel that somehow we have been tricked (*The Concept of Representation*, p. 34).

Pitkin furthermore remarks that the sovereign in Hobbes’ thinking holds sovereign power in his or her capacity as sovereign, and not *qua* representative. Hobbes’ view of representation, notably in the sense of a person representing other people, is therefore at best incomplete. His perspective on the subject is too narrow, and therefore Pitkin resorts to further examining the concept of representation in its more modern,

formalistic manifestation. She terms those views “formalistic” that concentrate on the formalities of the relationship implied in representation (Pitkin, p. 39).

Pitkin examines what she calls the “authorization view”, the first of these formalistic views of representation. The idea here is that those who hold this view, whom Pitkin calls “authorization theorists”, define representation in terms of a transaction that takes place at the outset of the relationship, before the act of representing actually begins. Once this initial act of authorization occurs, anything that the person so authorized does is in the context of the representative relationship.

Representation is a kind of “black box” shaped by the initial giving of authority, within which the representative can do what he pleases. If he leaves the box, if he exceeds the limits, he no longer represents. There can be no such thing as representing well or badly; either he represents or he does not. There is no such thing as the activity of representing or the duties of a representative; anything done after the right kind of authorization and within its limits is by definition representing (ibid.).

Some authorization theorists (Pitkin identifies Max Weber and Hans Wolff, *inter alia*) define a representative as a person who acts for a group such that the person’s behaviour is ascribed to the group. Some theorists of the *Organschaft* school conceive of all government officials as representatives, as they are organs of the state. This situation arises from the necessity of the complex division of labour in modern society. Individuals act, and these actions are ascribed to the group they represent and are binding on that group. Pitkin objects, however, that

at this point the *Organschaft* theory encounters a problem very similar to the difficulties in Hobbes’ argument. We note that not all government officials are called representatives. Rather, certain ones, particularly ones who are elected to a legislature (but perhaps also an elected executive), are given this designation. And it is not just any government agency that we speak of as a representative body. But given the authorization definition, there seems to be no way to account for the distinction, no way to explain

how elected legislators and legislatures are more truly or more fully representatives than other officials. ... The explanation commonly given by *Organschaft* theorists is that the organs we conventionally call representative(s) have a unique function in the state. Their function is to will; they are the state's willing-organ, just as the sovereign was for Hobbes. But the *Organschaft* theorists never succeed in making clear why the attribution of will should be more significant in this respect than the attribution of other actions (ibid., pp. 41-42).

The authorization theorists place a great deal of importance on elections; elections are seen as acts of "vesting authority" in someone (ibid., p. 43). Again, however, Pitkin points out that these writers face a certain difficulty involving the timeframe; that is, the either permanent or temporary character of political representation:

Their definitions of representation do not require that authority be given only for a limited time or that elections be held regularly. One could stipulate that a government is a representative government only if the acts of authorization occur reasonably often and hold for a limited time; but there is nothing in the meaning of representation as these theories have defined it that could justify or explain such a stipulation. As Hobbes saw, there is no reason why men could not give unlimited authority at the outset for an indefinite period of time, thus making any government that is initially elected, representative forever, or at least for the lifetimes of the ruler and the voters. None of these writers succeeds in dealing with this possibility, although none of them would accept a lifetime dictatorship as a representative government (ibid., p. 44).

Thus the authorization theorists are caught with a concept of representation that does not require periodic elections. As in Hobbes, a hereditary monarch or an undemocratic parliament can be representative. There is also a certain confusion in terms of which direction the relationship of authority works; representatives are authorized by election, yet then hold authority over those who elected them. This paradox is sometimes the case, though not always; some representative are authorized (by election, for instance), yet do not bear such authority over those who elected them. It is a question of whom we are electing; our rulers, or some other type of actor. This leads Pitkin to

identify an opposing view to the authorization theorists, one that she also classifies as being merely formal and empty of substantive content. This she calls the “accountability view” of representation.

For the accountability theorist, a representative is someone who is to be held to account, who will have to answer to another for what he does. The man or men to whom he must eventually account are those whom he represents. ... For the [authorization theorists], being a representative means being freed from the usual responsibility for one’s actions; for the accountability theorist, being a representative means precisely having new and special obligations. Whereas authorization theorists see the representative as free, the represented as bound, accountability theorists see precisely the converse. The authorization theorist defines representative democracy by equating elections with a grant of authority: a man represents because he has been elected at the outset of his term of office. The accountability theorist, on the contrary, equates elections with a holding-to-account: an elected official is a representative because (and insofar as) he will be subject to re-election or removal at the end of his term (*ibid.*, pp. 55-56).

Thus the accountability theorists introduce their view as a corrective response to the authorization view. Hobbes’ sovereign in their sense is the opposite of a representative, “and in that objection they find their definition,” Pitkin writes (p. 57). Furthermore,

The accountability theorists’ real interest is not in the controls or accountability which they impose on the representative; those are merely a device, a means to their ultimate purpose, which is a certain kind of behavior on the part of the representative. The point of holding him to account after he acts is to make him act in a certain way – look after his constituents, or do what they want. ... In genuine representation, the representative must eventually be held to account so that he will be responsive to the needs and claims of his constituents, to the obligations implicit in his position. That is what these theorists find missing from the authorization view, and what their definition is intended to supply (*ibid.*, p. 57).

For Pitkin both the authorization view and the accountability view are unsatisfactory. One view defines the representative as one who is elected, the other as one

who will be subject to election. One view sees representation as initiated in a certain way, the other as being terminated in a certain way. These views are practical hypotheses masquerading as conceptual understandings. For as Pitkin says,

Neither can tell us anything about what goes on during representation, how a representative ought to act or what he is expected to do, how to tell whether he has represented well or badly. ... And both views are formalistic, in the sense that their defining criterion for representation lies outside the activity of representing itself – before it begins or after it ends. Indeed, they recognize no such thing as “activity of representing”; to represent simply means to act after authorization or to act before being held to account (ibid., pp. 58-59).

At this point, Pitkin’s inquiry into representation breaks into two directions. In one direction, she pursues the concept of representation as an activity, i.e., what a representative does in the sense of “acting for” other people, as suggested by the German word *vertreten*. The other direction involves an inquiry into what representation *is*, in the sense of “standing for”, as suggested by the German word *darstellen*. Both *vertreten* and *darstellen* are translated as “to represent”, but their different connotations offer insight into what is meant by representing.

Representation as “standing for”, as what Pitkin refers to as descriptive representation, is a view that depends on the representative’s characteristic, on what he or she *is* or *is like*, rather than on a particular type of action or behaviour. The representative does not act on behalf of other; he or she “stands for” them, by virtue of some connection or correspondence, or resemblance between them (Pitkin, p. 61). This type of representation lends itself more to the idea of a society being represented by a body or assembly of persons, rather than a group of people being represented by one individual. The idea is that the representative assembly is representative of the people in that it is a

picture in miniature, a “mirror” or “map” of the population. The more accurate the picture, the more representative it is considered to be.

Consider the many political scientists, statesmen, theorists, and philosophers concerned with the proper composition of a legislative assembly – with constituencies and apportionment, with suffrage and party organization, with electoral systems and voting. ... What such an approach often produces, is the view that a representative body is distinguished by an accurate correspondence or resemblance to what it represents, by reflecting without distortion (Pitkin, p. 60).

Because those who hold the view of descriptive representation are so often proponents of proportional representation, those theorists of representation “standing for” shall be termed here “proportionalists”. Critics of the proportionalists, meanwhile, level the charge at them that proportionality in legislatures would make the tasks of government very difficult. Yet the proportionalists reply that it is in the deliberative function of assemblies that the diversity of voices in society must be heard. It is not in the action of government, which is not meant to be representative of the whole society (in the sense of “standing for” the whole), that proportionalists believe representation should take place, but in the context of the deliberative assembly’s presenting or reflecting popular opinion (ibid., p. 63). “Legislatures should not and cannot govern because they are unfit for political action; their task is to debate and criticize the action of government (ibid.).”

However, the question of representing as a kind of activity, as something someone does, is effectively nullified in this descriptive view. Representing comes about based on what a body of people *is* relative to the people at large; it has nothing to do with what this body of representatives actually *does*. This view of representation comes out of a movement for a more democratic society, the idea being that a representative assembly

would “vote yes or no on proposals put before it, and that the measure of its representativeness is essentially whether it votes as the whole nation would if the question were put to a plebiscite (ibid., p. 82).” The representative assembly thus reflects, is a picture of, stands for, the popular will. But if the people have no will on a certain issue, or if they do not know what they want, then what do representatives represent (ibid., p. 83.)? One may respond that it may be the task of representatives to agitate and advocate to create just such a will in the people, or even to substitute their own for that of the people in such cases; we might well say that this is what is meant by political leadership, but it nonetheless lies outside the definition of representing such as the descriptive view allows for.

Thus the problem develops that representation is valid when its function is only to yield information about the represented. “The real difficulties come if we are to use accuracy of correspondence not as a source of information, but as a justification for letting the representatives act for us (Pitkin, p. 88).” If the picture represented the subject perfectly, i.e., if there was a perfect correspondence in all determinations between the people and its assembly, then no one could object to substituting the representation of the people for the people itself. But if the accuracy is doubtful or imperfect, then we can no longer accept the guarantee of similarity of action between the represented people and the representative assembly, given a set of similar circumstances. Pitkin concludes that “the descriptive view can serve as a healthy corrective for the formalistic view, pointing to some of what the latter omits. But neither view by itself, nor yet a combination of the two views, is the whole story about representation. We must look further (ibid., p. 91).”

Pitkin's next concern is with representation as a kind of activity that goes on once a representative has been authorized and before he or she is held to account. As we have seen, it is the substance of this activity that is lost in the formalistic view. The descriptive view also does not include a theory about representation as a kind of activity, since in the descriptive view representation is a kind of "being", rather than a kind of "doing". In the descriptive view, a body or an individual is representative on account of a resemblance to that which is represented.

In the political context, the role of a representative "is to speak for, act for, look after the interests of their respective groups. ... This is what a political scientist means when he says that the test of representation is not whether the leader is elected, but how well he acts to further the objectives of those he represents (*ibid.*, p. 116)" Representation therefore involves a special kind of behaviour from the representative; special in that, at a very common-sense level, it is well known that a person will behave differently when he or she is acting for or on behalf of others, in relation to how a person behaves when acting for him- or herself. A representative acts, or is supposed to act, on certain expectations that bear on him or her.

Following a legal analogy, representation has often been thought of as a fiduciary relationship, involving trust and obligations on both sides (*ibid.*, p. 128). The analogy suggests that the representative, as a trustee, administers something for the benefit of someone else. The implication is that power really lies in others' hands, but for various reasons, they (*i.e.*, the people themselves) cannot or ought not to exercise it themselves. One reason might be the need for a division of labour in a complex society that renders

this trusteeship necessary. By this logic, not only are elected MP's trustees, but so are unelected officials up to Senators and Lords, and even the Monarch.

Pitkin criticizes this Burkean notion of representation, and writes:

Accountability may be an important part of trusteeship, but accountability to the beneficiary of the trust is no part of it. That is why Burke could regard all government as trusteeship; no democratic implication need be involved, nor are elections necessary. ... The implications of calling government a trusteeship are thus by no means democratic ones. It is implied that the government must then act for the benefit of the people, but it is equally implied that this does not require consultation or responsiveness to their wishes (ibid., pp. 129-130).

Therefore, the view of representation as acting for the benefit of the represented, as a kind of trusteeship, also falls short of being satisfactory. Pitkin is explicit that she is searching for a concept of representation in a democratic context; though what democracy means or involves is never explained thoroughly. So while representation does and must involve some sort of substitution of the representative for the represented, it is still not clear what sort of activity and behaviour are required of the representative in the "act" of representing. What powers and responsibilities does the activity involve and confer upon the representative? Does representation mean independence of action for the representative, or is some sort of mandate implied in the relationship between him or her, and the represented?

Pitkin weighs in on this controversy. She develops a formulation of representation as a substantive acting for others. It is "substantive" in the sense that it captures the concept of political representation; representing is not merely whatever a representative does once he or she has been authorized to do so by the electorate. As we have seen, such a view is a purely formal concept. Her formulation tends more towards a view held by

John Stuart Mill, and away from the conception of representation as developed by Edmund Burke. A representative is more than a caretaker for the represented, who, in Burke's conception, are seen as incapable of acting for themselves, or often even of expressing their own interests. Pitkin's formulation strikes a balance in the mandate-independence controversy. She writes:

[R]epresenting here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. The representative must act independently; his action must involve discretion and judgment; he must be the one who acts. The represented must also be (conceived as) capable of independent action and judgment, not merely being taken care of. And, despite the resulting potential for conflict between representative and represented about what is to be done, that conflict must not normally take place. The representative must act in such a way that there is no conflict, or if it occurs an explanation is called for. He must not be found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented without good reason in terms of their interest, without a good explanation of why their wishes are not in accord with their interest (pp. 209-210).

This formulation raises some important questions about the interplay between participation and representation in politics. For instance, in what way can the represented hold the representative responsible or make him or her responsive to their interests as they conceive them? How can the represented be capable of action and judgment, when there are no institutions for them to arrive at a consensus about what needs to be done? If the represented are really the important ones and not the representative, if the represented are primary in the equation while the representative is merely the 'dependent variable', should there not be means for resolving conflict between the represented and the representative in way that will ultimately satisfy the represented? And finally, if the representative is consistently at odds with the interests of his or her constituents, why can

they not simply remove or replace that representative, as in typical principal-agent scenarios?

The trouble is that in societies such as ours, the groups that are represented (or purportedly represented) in political institutions exist as a mere mass of atomized individuals. Mass democracy does not allow constituencies to form social links within themselves, such that the individual citizens that compose them can deliberate, decide, and become collectively conscious of what their interests are. In our system, representatives do not merely uphold interests, they define them. Pitkin neglects any analysis of society as a contradictory social formation, riven with vast inequalities in wealth, power and organizational capability. Her view of society, on the contrary, seems to be a unitary one. In reality, while the masses of people are precisely that – a disorganized, incoherent mass of individuals – some people have the social power to organize and promote their particular interests such that those interests are most keenly attended to by political representatives. The fact is that competitive elections require money, and money is by no means evenly distributed in society. Pitkin does raise the point that

no amount of public support can ... prove that the government is a representative one. When a ruler manipulates an inert mass of followers to accord with his will, we hesitate to say he represents them. In the same way, if an interest group engages in a vast propaganda campaign to persuade the public in favor of some measure, we do not regard this activity as representation of the public.

It seems to me that we show a government to be representative not by demonstrating its control over its subjects but just the reverse, by demonstrating that its subjects have control over what it does (p. 232).

Pitkin has hit the nail on the head here, in that it is precisely the case that in most contemporary democracies, representative governments (along with organized capital)

are capable of making the tail wag the dog, so to speak, even within the confines of a multi-party system of competitive elections. Electorates may have choices over representatives, but forces within civil society can “manipulate an inert mass of followers” through propaganda mechanisms to ensure that public choice is circumscribed within narrow bounds. It is not so much that representatives themselves can manipulate the public; it is rather certain elements of that highly variegated mass of “the public” that manipulate the represented in their choice of who represents them and how. If we look at society as having social contradictions, such as cleavages along the lines of class, we are more likely to question the efficacy of a system of political representation that ultimately rests on a basis of economic exploitation. As Roper writes,

[I]t is the process of exploitation that ensures business groups are better resourced than, for example, trade unions, women’s groups and environmentalists. Exploitation creates and perpetuates disparities of socio-economic status across the citizenry. Class struggle, capitalist control of the media, and business influence over the major political parties are further illustrations of the political ramifications of the underlying process of exploitation. ... Rupert Murdoch has a vastly superior capacity to utilise the right of free speech and the principle of a free press to communicate his views to the citizenry and the government, than a waged worker, welfare beneficiary, anti-racist activist or feminist (Roper, pp. 237-239).

Therefore, we should consider it no accident that the institutions of representative government take shape the way they do. Any reasonable mind must acknowledge the fact that for the governance of any large polity, some form of representation is necessary; the room will not hold all, and so decisions must be made through some form of deputation. But Pitkin seems to make a virtue of this necessity. There is no reason why, for instance, the authorization or the holding to account of a representative, or the granting of mandates or determining the level of independence of action, must necessarily take the

institutional forms that they currently have. Other institutional arrangements are conceivable; if one of Pitkin's criteria for genuine representation, for example, is responsiveness to the represented, then arrangements ought to exist for ensuring that responsiveness other than the risk of losing re-election. Roper points out:

There is no right of recall built into the system: once elected, representatives can completely disregard the wishes of their constituencies with no fear of being withdrawn from office and replaced. The process of secret ballot voting itself tends to atomise the electorate. Voters spend five minutes once every three, four, or five year filling out a ballot paper in the seclusion of a private booth and then deposit the ballot paper in a box (Roper, p. 239).

The representative system as it exists is flawed. It does not allow the represented to act for themselves, in their own name, in any way. It lacks institutional features to guarantee the responsiveness of representatives to the represented, and has no way of sanctioning the failure to represent constituents properly except at election time. It seems to be established with the intention of allowing powerful economic actors to sway mass audiences and apply non-democratic pressure on representatives, often against the interests and desires of the intended constituents that, therefore, go unrepresented. Representation may be a necessary feature of modern democracy, but at the same time, for representative government to be truly democratic, precisely the opposite feature must be invoked. Institutional arrangements for popular participation must exist precisely to ensure that representative institutions are genuinely representative of the constituency that is supposed to be represented. However, this is the very direction in which society is not moving; quite the contrary, the system of political governance seems to be growing less representative as time goes on, by Pitkin's criteria.

Bernard Manin writes that the modern period has recently entered a new phase of representative government, what he calls “audience” democracy. The idea here is that elite candidates compete in elections through media campaigns to mobilize a generally passive electorate. There is no independent public will, and little public opinion even, to be expressed; rather, it is these campaigns that “manufacture” public opinion and will. The electorate does not express its will; it is reduced to a mere audience that responds by reacting to the terms that have been presented on the political stage (Manin, p. 223).

When a candidate today is elected on the basis of his image, and seeks to persuade voters that he is fitter than others to confront the future, voters have less say about what he will do than when a party presented a list of measures it intended to implement. In this sense... representative government appears to have ceased its progress towards popular self-government. ... [T]he democratization of representation, the narrowing of the gap between representative and represented, and the growing influence of the wishes of the governed on the decisions of those in government have turned out to be less durable than expected. While one certainly can say that democracy has broadened, one cannot say with the same certainty that it has deepened (Manin, pp. 233-234).

Canadian political scientist C.B. Macpherson develops a complementary descriptive model of modern liberal democracy in his book *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. It is essentially a market model of democracy based on neoclassical economics. This model, which naturally is still a form of representative democracy, is the appropriate form of political arrangement for a capitalist market society. Society and polity parallel each other, and the same models can be used to describe both. The “equilibrium model” of democracy

empties out the moral content which Model 2 [“developmental democracy”] had put into the idea of democracy. There is no nonsense about democracy as a vehicle for the improvement of mankind. Participation is not a value in itself, nor even an instrumental value for the achievement of a higher, more socially conscious set of human beings.

The purpose of democracy is to register the desires of people as they are, not contribute to what they might be or might wish to be. Democracy is simply a market mechanism: the voters are the consumers; the politicians are the entrepreneurs. ... Not only did the market model seem to correspond to, and hence to explain, the actual political behaviour of the main component parts of the political system – the voters and the parties; it also seemed to justify that behaviour, and hence the whole system (Macpherson, pp. 78-79).

However, even if we adhere to the premises of this model, we must discard certain features of it which do not accurately describe how the political ‘market’ functions in reality. For instance, a realistic model concedes that it is by no means an economy of perfect competition that describes representative democracy, but would rather an oligopolistic power-bloc model (Macpherson, p. 80). As in imperfect competition, there are numerous consumers of political goods and services (voters), but very few suppliers (political parties). Furthermore, parties (like oligopolies) do not so much discover demand as *dictate* demand for their political products (policies) through advertising and propaganda (ibid., pp. 90-91). Oligopolistic parties compete largely through the sales effort, as it were, rather than by discovering what the public demands and responding to those demands. Additionally, as is known in economics, it is not so much demand *per se* that suppliers react to, but effective demand; that is, demand backed by the ability to pay. This means money in economic markets, but in the political market,

purchasing power is to a large extent, but not entirely, money – the money needed to support a party or a candidate in an election campaign, to organize a pressure group, or to buy space and time in the mass media (or to own some of the mass media). But political purchasing power includes also indirect expenditure of energy in campaigning, organizing, and participating in other ways in the political process.

In so far as the political purchasing power is money, we can scarcely say that the equilibrating process is democratic in any society, like ours, in which there is substantial inequality of wealth and of the chances of acquiring wealth. We may still call it consumer sovereignty if

we wish. But the sovereignty of an aggregate of such unequal consumers is not evidently democratic (Macpherson, p. 87).

Thus Macpherson's equilibrium model shows that representative democracy is highly problematic on its own terms, being analogous to an undemocratic economic model in which consumer sovereignty is an illusion at best. Roper, like many Marxists, criticizes the "democratic swindle" of a society based on the exploitation of labour and its illusory equality. Manin's analysis of "audience" democracy demonstrates highly problematic developments in contemporary types of representative government, and that modern citizens are very much a passive mass of voters who react to terms of political discourse set by more powerful actors. Key in Pitkin's exploration of the concept of representation was the idea that for representation to be genuine, the represented have to be conceived as capable of acting for themselves. But this is simply far from the reality. Not only are the represented very limited in terms of their capacity for action, but they are even restricted in their capacity to form a political will or express their interests independently. Therefore, for genuine representation to take place there must be some form of activity that goes on in addition to, and that is complementary to, the activity of representation that Pitkin discusses. Institutional mechanisms are required that allow the represented to act and speak for themselves, deliberate on their interests, form political will, and supervise and control their representatives (to the extent that representatives are necessary). These are required to level the playing field of an economically unequal society in which some actors have far more power to influence political outcomes than others. If democracy is to live up to its promise, it will have to adopt participatory institutional arrangements.

Achieving participatory democracy

C.B. Macpherson proposes that the main problem with participatory democracy is not how it might operate, but how a society might go about achieving it. Arriving at participatory democracy assumes that such a system can be worked out in practice and in detail so as to determine the institutional arrangements that would allow citizens to participate fully in the governance of society. Macpherson writes that “it seems likely that if we can reach it, or reach any substantial instalment of it, our way along the road to reaching it will have made us capable of running it, or at least less incapable than we now are (Macpherson, p. 98).” It is the struggle to achieve a more participatory system that is the important factor; in the process of struggle, questions of institutional structure will largely resolve themselves over time, as an empowered and participatory citizenry engages in a deliberative process of discovery as to what institutional arrangements work and which should be discarded or modified. It is, for the most part, not a matter of the adoption of pre-designed schemes, but rather an organic evolution towards a set of institutional structures that empower people, and which might never remain static. These structures will take shape as necessary in a given moment, and systems would be likely to develop from a process of groups duplicating what they see functioning in other locations. The crystallization of organizational structures would likely occur over the long run, but in the short term one would expect to see a period of experimentation and discovery.

Yet we are left with the question of how to even begin on the road to achieving participatory democracy from the starting point of liberal representative democracy. How do we get from A to B? Macpherson continues: “[T]he present non-participatory or

scarcely participatory political system ... does fit an unequal society of conflicting consumers and appropriators: indeed, nothing but that system, with its competing political élites and voter apathy, seems competent to hold such a society together (ibid., p. 99).” Capitalist society dominated by “consumers” and “appropriators” – by which Macpherson means the dominant ideology of consumerism (the increasing satisfaction of artificially produced needs) of the masses, and the exploitation, on the other hand, by the capitalist class – is the basis on which bourgeois democracy (i.e., liberal representative government) rests. Thus the ideology supports the political system, and the political system supports the ideology. Macpherson indicates that there are two prerequisites for the emergence of participatory democracy:

One is a change in people’s consciousness (or unconsciousness), from seeing themselves and acting as essentially consumers to seeing themselves and acting as exerters and enjoyers of the exertion of their own capacities. ... For the latter self-image brings with it a sense of community which the former does not. One can acquire and consume by oneself, for one’s own satisfaction or to show one’s superiority to others: this does not require or foster a sense of community; whereas the enjoyment and development of one’s capacities is to be done for the most part in conjunction with others, in some relation of community. And it will not be doubted that the operation of a participatory democracy would require a stronger sense of community than now prevails.

The other prerequisite is a great reduction in the present level of social and economic inequality, since that inequality ... requires a non-participatory party system to hold the society together. And as long as inequality is accepted, the non-participatory political system is likely to be accepted by all those in all classes who prefer stability to the process of complete social breakdown (ibid., pp. 99-100).

The situation we therefore find ourselves in is a vicious circle: for without these prerequisites, participatory democracy is unlikely to develop; yet a reduction in inequality and a change in social consciousness are unlikely to develop unless there is some substantial increase in popular political participation. Macpherson, however, sees three

“loopholes” in this vicious circle, which we may term respectively (1) the ecological loophole, (2) the corporate oligarchy loophole, and (3) the economic crisis loophole.

The ecological loophole. Macpherson points out that even if we take “bourgeois man” as a given – that is, human beings as rational, self-maximizing cost/benefit calculators – then people will necessarily come to see the impending ecological crises as harmful to their well-being. This undermines the ideology of consumerism; the natural world places limits on humanity’s ambitions as infinite appropriators. Macpherson writes:

More and more people ... still see the benefits of economic growth, but they are now beginning to see some of the costs they hadn’t counted before. The most obvious of these are the costs of air, water, and earth pollution. These are costs largely in terms of the quality of life. Is it too much to suggest that this awareness of quality is a first step away from being satisfied with quantity, and so a first step away from seeing ourselves as infinite consumers, towards valuing our ability to exert our energies and capacities in a decent environment? ... Other costs of economic growth, notably the extravagant depletion of natural resources and the likelihood of irreversible ecological damage, are also increasingly being noticed. Awareness of the costs of economic growth takes people beyond sheer consumer consciousness. It can be expected to set up some consciousness of a public interest that is not looked after either by the private interest of each consumer or by the competition of political élites (ibid., p. 102).

Climate change poses an even greater threat than any environmental problem imagined by Macpherson. To confront climate change, human beings will have to consciously reduce their output of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases. This will undoubtedly require reducing production, consumption and travel to limit and lower atmospheric carbon, and this despite any conversion to renewable energy and non-fossil fuels. This will affect people’s lifestyles the most in the advanced capitalist countries. The basis for Macpherson’s “equilibrium democracy” will be undermined. People will

demand a greater say in the disposal of resources and, potentially, in the ‘carbon budgets’ most countries will have to institute. On the positive side, the necessary reduction in production may result in a shorter work day and/or week, as the labour requirements of society are spread among a wider number of people to limit unemployment. This could result in citizens having the necessary leisure time to participate in democratic politics at a local level. They may in fact demand it, seeing political empowerment as a trade-off for their reduced capacity to consume.

The corporate oligarchy loophole. Macpherson points out the growing awareness in people of the consequences of political apathy and of limited traditional forms of industrial action that allow “the concentration of corporate power to dominate our neighbourhoods, our jobs, our security, and the quality of life at work and at home (ibid., p. 103).” He cites vital forms of resistance to this phenomenon, namely civil-society organizations, neighbourhood and urban associations and, most importantly, movements for workplace and industrial democracy. It is popular participation and expanding social activism that counters these problems, and it may be expected that such social movements could reach a kind of ‘critical mass’ that would make the demand for institutional reform widespread, reform that would permit a much wider participation in politics than we see currently.

The economic crisis loophole. Macpherson was writing in the context of the 1970s’ economic crisis (low growth, high unemployment and high inflation) which resulted in the neoliberal restructuring of the 1980s. Now, neoliberalism is in crisis, and so the same opportunities for the stimulation of working-class consciousness exist. The system (capitalism and its political manifestation, representative democracy) can be

challenged, and one result could be a set a political demands that involve institutional changes to allow for popular participation in government. Otherwise, a resolution to the current crisis will again be carried out on the backs of working people. The demand for participatory democracy can be seen as a class-oriented project. Organizations that want to challenge capitalism should adopt participatory democracy as an explicit goal, especially considering the public perception of the pronounced lack of democracy in post-capitalist states. The demand for participatory democracy would not only legitimize socialist groups in the eyes of the public, but would help to win mass support as a desirable demand in and of itself.

Thus each of these loopholes demands taking advantage of the various crises and contradictions of the capitalist system, whether they are ecological, economic or socio-political in nature. In all likelihood, a coherent strategy for establishing participatory democracy will involve confronting all three of these crises, if not more. Participatory democracy is a system whereby the masses find the political form which is most suited to their rule, just as was the case in classical Athens. The struggle for participatory democracy is thus a class project. As we have seen, the actual expression of this form of class rule is arrived at through an organic process of experimentation in the course of struggle. That said, proposals for institutional arrangements, based on past experience, must be available for consideration, deliberation and debate. The danger is that liberal representative democracy re-establishes itself, being the most readily available, well-known and comfortable model, resulting in a reactionary politics in a time of crisis. Part Two of this thesis will therefore be dedicated to examining various concrete models and proposed institutional arrangements for a viable participatory democratic system.

Part Two

The Athenian Model

As the second part of this thesis deals with both historical and proposed models of participatory democracy, it is fitting that we begin by examining the political institutions of the first democracy, classical Athens. In the Western tradition, Athens was the first working model of democracy and gave this model of political governance its name. In examining this model it is not necessary to give a detailed account of how Athenian democracy emerged out of the class struggles of the seventh to fifth centuries BCE. Suffice it to say, for the period from the reforms of Cleisthenes around 508 BCE until the Macedonian conquest, Athens enjoyed a political system in which citizens could participate in the making of laws, the passing of decrees, the judging of law cases, as well as in the executive functions of the *polis*, the magistracies.

By modern standards, Athenian democracy was extremely problematic based on how Athens defined and limited citizenship. Women were entirely excluded from public life. A sizable portion of the city-state's population was composed of slaves, who were no more than property, and were likewise excluded from citizenship. So was the city's large population of resident aliens, who, though some had lived in Athens for generations, were nonetheless excluded as well. Citizenship was limited to free-born adult males who were descended from citizens. The Athenian concept of citizenship meant not just membership in the *polis*, but rather entailed taking a share in the legislative and judicial functions of the state, and of participating directly in the affairs of state (Roper, p. 28).

Athenian democracy was marked by a general commitment to the principle of civic virtue; dedication to the republic, the city-state, and the

subordination of private life to public affairs and the common good. The principle of government was the principle of a form of life: direct participation. The process of government was based on free and unrestricted discourse, guaranteed by *isegoria*, an equal right of all citizens to speak freely, and *isonomia*, roughly meaning equality before the law... The peculiarly modern distinctions that emerged with Machiavelli (1429-1527) and Hobbes (1588-1679) between state and society, specialised officials and citizens, 'the people' and government, are not part of the philosophy of the Athenian city-state. For this city-state celebrated the notion of an active, involved citizenry in a process of self-government; the governors were to be the governed. All citizens met to debate, decide and enact the law (Roper, pp. 28-29).

One of the major reforms of Cleisthenes involved breaking up the old tribal affiliations of Athens and establishing ten new tribes, each composed of a section of the city of Athens, a section of the inland region, and a section of the coastal area. Furthermore, these tribes were divided into 139 *demes*. The *demes* were local divisions of the Attic region, and their purpose seems to have been to create socially cross-cutting solidarities among the citizens of Attica. As Roper writes, "The *deme* or village became the basic unit of the new state. ... The *deme* was of crucial importance not only because a man's citizenship was defined by his membership of a particular *deme*, even if he subsequently resided elsewhere, but it was through the *deme* that the peasant-citizens could exert real political influence (ibid, pp. 22-23)." Furthermore, any citizen could become a *demarch*, the chief official of a *deme* through whom the administration of the city was carried out.

Membership in the *demes* was important, because it was within the *demes* that membership in the 500-person Council, or *Boule*, was determined. The *demes* selected a list of nominees to the *Boule*, and membership was finally selected by lot from those lists. The *Boule* was essentially Athens' executive body; a rotating executive committee was

appointed from its numbers to oversee the city for a short period until the duties were passed on to other members. One member was chosen by lot to preside over the committee for one day, and this individual for that day would be the official head of state. This system of selection by lot prevented power from being grabbed by any one particular group of citizens, or by any individual (ibid., pp. 23-24). The democratic system of Athens was essentially designed to keep power in the hands of the poor majority of Athenians.

The *Boule* met almost every day throughout the year, and one of its main duties was to set the agenda for items to be debated and deliberated on in the Assembly, or *Ekklesia*. The Assembly was the sovereign decision-making body of ancient Athens; it determined war or peace, as well as general policy on foreign and domestic affairs, taxation, finance, the maintenance of public order, and oversaw the performance of executive officials, whom it could remove from office for poor performance of their duties (ibid., p. 25). Roper reports that “The Assembly met 40 times a year, possibly more frequently in some years, and had a quorum of 6000 citizens... The Assembly aimed for unanimity and consensus, but where this could not be achieved issues were put to a formal vote with majority rule (ibid.).” It is through the Assembly that the mass of the citizens of Athens, the *demos*, could participate in public affairs and wield political power.

Athenian democracy also dominated in the judicial sphere. Each year, 6000 citizens were selected by lots to act as *dicasts* for the year, that is, to serve on the juries of the large public courts. These courts ranged in size from 201 to 501 members, depending on the seriousness of the charges (ibid., p. 26). Payment for service in courts was

eventually introduced, allowing the poor to participate still further. Guilt, innocence or liability was determined on the basis of a vote. Roper maintains that the courts assumed a much greater importance after the re-establishment of democracy in 403 BCE, when they began to perform 'judicial review' of the decrees of the Assembly, activities of the *Boule*, and the performance of magistrates (ibid.). The courts' conducting of political trials may also have been of some importance to the democracy, but these have left a mixed legacy, notably with the trial of Socrates, which can be seen to fall into this category. The same problematic legacy could even be said to exist at the level of the Assembly, where influential orators manipulated public opinion, which in the Peloponnesian War led to the most tragic of consequences for the *polis*.

This provides an overview of the institutionalized system of government used by the Athenians in the Western world's first democracy. The system allowed and encouraged the greatest expression of the people's will because it maximized popular participation, especially for those citizens lowest in wealth and social power. When, in the late 4th century BCE, powerful forces (i.e., the Macedonians) wished to destroy Athenian democracy, they undermined or abolished these institutions of popular participation whenever they could (see Roper, p. 34). Some decisions were no longer in the hands of Athenians at all, since the city had become part of a vast empire; other powers that remained with Athens were limited in their exercise to the wealthiest citizens that the new constitution had left enfranchised – those with sufficient wealth to be hoplites. Furthermore, many public offices were restricted to the rich by being attached to liturgies, i.e., the funding of expensive civic duties (ibid.).

Rousseau's Ideal State

Having thus identified the main features of the Athenian democracy of 2500 years ago, we will now move on to the early modern period and examine the character of the ideal state as described by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*. Rousseau's vision is of a participatory republic. The people are sovereign, and sovereignty entails the power to make laws for the body politic. It is the people as sovereign that declares the general will, and it is this general will that is the substance of what becomes the law. Rousseau argues that "sovereignty, being nothing other than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated; and that the sovereign, which is simply a collective being, cannot be represented by anyone but itself – power may be delegated, but the will cannot be (p. 69)." Thus Rousseau posits a state in which various forms of executive magistracies can and should be delegated to officials who have certain powers, but that such acts of delegation are particular acts of the sovereign. Government is a creation of the law, and its power is purely executive in nature (see Book III, Chapter 16). Legislation is an act of will, and therefore a function of the sovereign, not of the government.

But how does the sovereign, this "collective being", manifest and maintain itself? It cannot be through representatives, since Rousseau denies that will can be alienated or represented. Sovereignty "is either the general will or it is something else – there is no intermediate possibility (ibid., p. 141)." Rousseau asserts therefore that "The sovereign, having no other force than the legislative power, acts only through the laws, and since the laws are nothing other than the authentic acts of the general will, the sovereign can only act when the people is assembled (ibid, p. 136)." Rousseau denies that assemblies of the

people are impossible in the modern age, despite the fact of having large states compared to, for example, Athens or republican Rome, or even Rousseau's own Geneva. He writes:

All things considered, I do not see how it will be possible henceforth among people like us for the sovereign to maintain the exercise of its rights unless the republic is very small. But if it is very small, will it not be subjugated? No. I shall show later how the external strength of a large people can be combined with the free government and good order of a small state (p. 143).

Furthermore, in a footnote at the end of Book III, Chapter 15, he mentions that the principles behind confederations "have yet to be established (p. 143)," and does not pursue these ideas in *The Social Contract* as it has come down to us. We shall examine what he means by this shortly, when we come to see what Rousseau says about deputies. Returning to the subject at hand of sovereign assemblies of the people, Rousseau continues:

It is not enough that the assembled people should have once determined the constitution of the state by giving sanction to a body of laws; it is not enough that it should set up a perpetual government, or that it should have provided once and for all for the election of magistrates. In addition to the extraordinary assemblies that unforeseen events may necessitate, there must be fixed and periodic assemblies which nothing can abolish or prorogue, so that on the appointed day the people is rightfully summoned by the law itself without any further formal convocation being needed (p. 137).

Thus it is by means of, and only by means of, the assembly of the people that the general will is made known and the sovereign is manifested. And it is only thus that legitimate laws may be passed. All the citizens have a say in the passing of laws, not merely in the establishment of a constitution or during the elections of government officials; and government, as we have seen, means only the executive power of the state. As Rousseau states, "Since the law is nothing other than a declaration of the general will,

it is clear that there cannot be representation of the people in the legislative power; but there may and should be such representation in the executive power, *which is only the instrument for applying the law* (p. 142, emphasis added).”

Yet what exactly is the nature of such assemblies? There the assembled people declare their assent or their veto to the law or laws proposed to them. At such formal gatherings, it is the expression of the general will on behalf of the people that is sought. At such assemblies, the people are convoked for this purpose alone; they do not discuss or deliberate collectively. Presumably the people listen, consider the debate, and vote. Speaking at the assemblies, the debating and the proposing of laws, if we are to understand Rousseau correctly, are meant to be the prerogative of elected officials. But the important point here is that representatives may propose and debate laws, *but they do not decide*. Decision is an act of will, and will resides in the assembled people, never in their government. Rousseau introduces the topic, but claims the subject is too large to be confined to *The Social Contract*:

I might say a great deal here about the simple right of voting in every act of sovereignty, a right of which nothing can deprive citizens, and also about the right of *speaking, proposing and debating – a right which the government always take great care to assign only to its own members –* but this important subject would require a separate treatise, and I cannot put everything in this one (p. 151, emphasis added).

In the legislative sphere, the assembled people decide. The universal is the sphere of the sovereign; government is only involved in particular acts, in the application of the law. Yet Rousseau makes room in his ideal state for elected deputies. These deputies are not representatives in the executive sphere; they do not *govern* the state. Rousseau is

clear that they have a role in legislation, but it is not clear what that role is. They do not have final decision-making powers. Rousseau writes:

The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives: they are merely its agents, and can carry through no definitive acts. Every law the people has not ratified in person is null and void — is, in fact, not a law. The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament. As soon as they are elected, the people is enslaved; it is nothing. In the brief moments of its freedom, the English people makes such a use of that freedom that it deserves to lose it (p. 141).

Therefore, the question arises, what is the role of deputies? They do not represent the people, in that they do not “stand in” for the people in their inalienable decision-making power. Legislative power is not transferred to these deputies in the act of election, for as we have seen, Rousseau denies that will can be alienated. Deputies do not pass laws, but also they do not govern the state. The example Rousseau uses of England is telling; it is here that an analysis may be revealing. Members of Parliament (significantly called *députés* in French) discuss, debate and propose laws and motions in the legislature, often (but not always) on behalf of the constituents who elected them. Despite Rousseau stating that “speaking, proposing and debating” in assemblies are acts reserved for government, he may have meant government in the broad sense of a people’s elected deputies collectively, whether they perform executive functions or not. In the 18th century British Parliament, some elected members held ministerial positions, as they do today; others merely spoke, deliberated, and voted on laws. Therefore, it may be that Rousseau meant for the people to elect deputies to speak, propose and debate in the assemblies while the final act of decision or ratification lay with the people.

Furthermore, a look at the original French text will be helpful. The sentence “they [the deputies] are merely its [the people’s] *agents*” (emphasis mine) is also translated, by G.D.H. Cole for instance, “they are merely its stewards”. Neither quite does justice to the original, which states that the people’s deputies “*ne sont que ses commissaires*” (Book III, Ch. 15). The term *commissaires* can be translated “commissioners” in the sense of someone who bears a commission, or who has been commissioned to do something (rather than “commissioner” in the sense of someone doing the commissioning). The connotation of the word is that of a person who has been given a specific task or set of tasks to carry out in the name of the people or the body that commissioned him or her. The idea conveyed is of a delegate, a servant or an employee. On the other hand “representation” for Rousseau implies that certain powers have been alienated to the representative by the represented, that the representative is acting for the people on their behalf, and, in a sense, carries their wills within him or her in a kind of plenipotentiary capacity. But Rousseau, to repeat, states clearly that will cannot be alienated, and for that reason, cannot be represented. Deputies may be carriers of a certain commission, they may have certain duties on behalf of their electors, but they do not *will* in place of the people.

It may be that Rousseau had another role for deputies in mind, which he did not have the opportunity to develop in *The Social Contract*, as mentioned above. It is quite likely that, in addition to their purely discursive role as discussed above, he saw a specific role for deputies in states that were larger than city-republics (ancient Athens or Rome, 18th century Geneva). Rousseau was quite conscious that in actually existing European states, there would be no way to fit the entire nation into one assembly hall. This, he

grants, could only be done at the local level. National-level deliberative assemblies could therefore only be held by means of deputation, i.e., by electing deputies locally who would be sent to speak, discuss and debate at central locations. The important factor here, however, is that even on such a large scale, such deputies would still *not be representatives*. How this may be the case Rousseau elaborates in his work

Considerations on the Government of Poland, where Rousseau writes:

One of the greatest disadvantages of large states, the one which above all makes liberty most difficult to preserve in them, is that the legislative power cannot manifest itself directly, and can act only by delegation. That has its good and its evil side; but the evil outweighs the good. A legislature made up of the whole citizen body is impossible to corrupt, but easy to deceive. Representatives of the people are hard to deceive, but easy to corrupt; and it rarely happens that they are not so corrupted (Chapter 7).

Rousseau sees two means of preventing the corruption of representatives. One is frequent elections, along with obstacles to being elected to two successive diets, as well as the possibility of term limits. (“Diet” is the term used for the Polish assembly.) His second suggestion is effectively to make the deputies something other than representatives in the sense established above by binding those elected to the diet with an imperative mandate, or formal instructions from the electors.

The second means is to bind the representatives to follow their instructions exactly, and to make them render their constituents a strict account of their conduct in the diet. In this respect I can only marvel at the negligence, the carelessness and, I would even venture to say, the stupidity of the English nation, which, after having armed its deputies with supreme power, has added no brake to regulate the use they may make of that power throughout the seven years of their mandate (ibid.).

But how is this imperative mandate to be carried out? If every deputy in the diet speaks and acts on behalf thousands of citizens, how can these dispersed thousands

organize themselves to hold their deputies to account? How can they formulate and draft a formal mandate for their elected deputy in order to circumscribe his parliamentary activity, such that he or she is really executing the will of the electors? Rousseau's answer is to make use of lower-level assemblies of local authority called "dietines".

I observe that the Poles are not sufficiently aware of the importance of their dietines, of all they owe to them, nor of all they might get from them by extending their authority and by regularising their form. I myself am convinced that, if the confederations have saved the fatherland, it is the dietines that have preserved it, and that they are the true palladium of liberty.

The instructions of the deputies should be drawn up with great care, not only on the subjects listed in the royal agenda, but also on the other current needs of the state or province; and this should be done by a committee presided over, if you will, by the marshal of the dietine, but otherwise composed of members chosen by majority vote; and the nobility should not disperse until these instructions have been read, debated and approved in plenary session. In addition to the original text of these instructions, handed to the deputies together with their patents of election, a copy signed by them should remain in the archives of the dietine. It is on the basis of these instructions that they ought, on their return, to report on their actions at a session of the dietine convened expressly for that purpose, a custom which must absolutely be revived; and it is on the basis of this report that they should either be excluded from all subsequent candidacy for the deputyship, or else declared eligible, if they have followed their instructions to the satisfaction of their constituents. This examination is of the utmost importance; it would be impossible to pay too much attention to it, or to observe its results too carefully. With each word the deputy speaks in the diet, and with every move he makes, he must already see himself under the eyes of his constituents, and feel the future influence of their judgment both on his hopes of advancement, and on that good opinion of his compatriots which is indispensable to the realisation of those hopes; for, after all, it is not to express their own private sentiments, but to declare the will of the nation, that the nation sends deputies to the diet. This brake is absolutely necessary to hold them to their duty, and to prevent any sort of corruption from any source. Whatever may be said, I cannot see any disadvantage in this limitation, for the chamber of deputies, which does not, or should not, participate in the details of administration, can never have to deal with any unexpected matter; but if such a matter did arise, and a deputy did nothing contrary to the express will of his constituents, they would not blame him for having expressed his opinion, like a good citizen, on a matter they had not

foreseen, and on which they had reached no decision. I will add, in conclusion, that if there were actually some disadvantage in holding the deputies thus bound by their instructions, it could not outweigh the immense advantage of preventing the law from ever being anything but the real expression of the will of the nation (ibid.).

Thus, it is not as an unordered mass that citizens hold their deputies to account, which would be difficult if not impossible, but through primary-level councils of deputies convened for local purposes. In addition to deliberating and deciding on issues within the reach of local governance, the dietines play the crucial role of mandating, overseeing, and holding to account the deputy sent to the national-level diet. In this manner the elected deputy is prevented from being able to deceive or misrepresent his electors, and any corruption on the deputy's part is likely to be censured or punished. Deputies follow their instructions in all matters, and are only entrusted to operate independently when unforeseen circumstances arise. Through these measures, Rousseau maintains, the general will of the citizens of a large country can be expressed.

Finally, on the topic of Rousseau, we must say a word on the nature of deliberation as he sees it taking place in assemblies. Rousseau imagines a state whose citizens are more or less equal in wealth and condition, such that "no citizen shall ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself (*The Social Contract*, p. 96)." In a state of relative equals, there is the possibility of discovering the general will because the citizens will have common interests. In a class-riven society, for instance, we might expect frequent disagreements due to opposing interests, and the general will would be difficult to discern or even non-existent. In a relatively egalitarian society such as Rousseau imagines, the general will can show itself

more easily; deliberation in assemblies would not be a lengthy matter, and votes would frequently show unanimous opinions. “However,” he writes,

when the social tie begins to slacken and the state to weaken, when particular interests begin to make themselves felt and sectional societies begin to exert an influence over the greater society, the common interest becomes corrupted and meets opponents; voting is no longer unanimous; the general will is no longer the will of all; contradictions and disputes arise; and even the best opinion is not allowed to prevail unchallenged. ... The greater harmony that reigns in the public assemblies, the more, in other words, that public opinion approaches unanimity, the more the general will is dominant; whereas long debates, dissensions and disturbances bespeak the ascendance of particular interests and the decline of the state (ibid., pp. 150-151).

The Pyramidal Council System

Marx, describing the scheme for the political organization of France proposed by the Paris communards in 1871, remarked on a political structure that bears a striking resemblance to the one envisioned by Rousseau:

In a rough sketch of national organization, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet... The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents. The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal and thereafter responsible agents (Marx, p. 633).

Authors who have researched how participatory democracy has functioned in the past and ought to function in the future display a startling consensus on how such a system would work in practice. Writers as diverse as Hannah Arendt, C.B. Macpherson, and Stephen Shalom are convinced that the appropriate structure for a modern system of

participatory democracy is a pyramidal council system. Marx was describing something similar in the passage quoted above. A pyramidal council system means a political structure in which base-level councils exist to formulate the popular will of grassroots constituencies, incorporating as much direct democracy as possible. Each council elects one or more delegates to the next higher-level council, and so on until the national or supra-national level is reached. As Macpherson explains it:

[T]he simplest model that could properly be called a participatory democracy would be a pyramidal system with direct democracy at the base and delegate democracy at every level above that. Thus one would start with direct democracy at the neighbourhood or factory level – actual face-to-face discussion and decision by consensus or majority, and election of delegates who would make up a council at the next more inclusive level, say a city borough or ward or township. The delegates would have to be sufficiently instructed by and accountable to those who elected them to make decisions at the council level reasonably democratic. So it would go to the top level, which would be a national council for matters of national concern, and local and regional councils for matters of less than national concern. ... What is needed, at every stage, to make the system democratic, is that the decision-makers and issue-formulators elected from below be held responsible to those below by being subject to re-election or even recall (Macpherson, pp. 108-109).

Arendt says much the same thing, focusing on how in revolutionary situations in modern times, such as in France, Russia, Germany and Hungary, “elementary republics” sprang up as organs of popular power – “the communes, the councils, the *Räte*, the *soviets* (Arendt, p. 260).” They evolved a system of democracy much different from the mass elections of representatives which we are so familiar with today. Such a system produces leaders that Arendt characterizes as a new type of “élite.” Such individuals are far different from the type of political leaders that exist today, who are often dealers in “plain salesmanship” (Arendt, p. 282). The latter type is an élite chosen according to

criteria and standards that are profoundly unpolitical. Arendt draws a contrast between these two types of élite, writing:

With respect to the elementary councils that sprung up wherever people lived or worked together, one is tempted to say that they had selected themselves; those who organized themselves were those who cared and those who took the initiative; they were the political élite of the people brought into the open by the revolution. From these “elementary republics,” the councilmen then chose their deputies for the next higher council, and these deputies, again, were selected by their peers, they were not subject to any pressure either from above or below. ... No doubt this form of government, if fully developed, *would have assumed again the shape of a pyramid*, which, of course, is the shape of an essentially authoritarian government. But while, in all authoritarian government we know of, authority is filtered down from above, in this case authority would have been generated neither at the top nor at the bottom, but on each of the pyramid’s layers; and this obviously could constitute the solution to one of the most serious problems of all modern politics, which is not how to reconcile freedom and equality but how to reconcile equality and authority (ibid., pp. 282-283, emphasis added).

While Macpherson and Arendt are essentially in agreement about the necessity for a pyramidal structure of democratic councils, they disagree on the nature of the authority borne by these councils. Macpherson clearly sees a bottom-up structure of authority (in systems theory often called a ‘lowerarchy’), each council and each delegate being authorized to act on instructions from the council that delegated him or her. Arendt thinks that delegates, on the other hand, “are not subject to any pressure from above or below,” and that authority does not simply flow upward from the grassroots of society but rather is generated “on each of the pyramid’s layers.” This is understandable if Arendt’s delegates, unlike Macpherson’s, are not subject to recall by their delegating council on the next level down the pyramid. This raises the issue of the *mandat impératif*, that is, to what extent should delegates be bound by formal instructions from their

councils, as Rousseau imagined, and as Marx described about the Paris Commune.

Shalom is of the belief that:

These delegates would be charged with trying to reflect the actual views of the council they came from. But they would not be “mandated”: that is, they would not be told “this is how you must vote,” for if they were then the higher council they were attending would not be a deliberative body. In fact, the delegates could then be easily replaced by a computer message relaying the sentiments of the lower council (Shalom, subsection 5.4).

While this may be the case, Shalom still upholds the power of lower-level councils to recall and replace their delegates. This in effect could be described as a ‘flexible mandate’, the idea being that delegates have room to manoeuvre in their deliberations, which often may involve compromise and bargaining as much as rational debate and persuasion. However, the threat of recall hanging over delegates, even without a formal imperative mandate, would act as a strong incentive to relay and uphold the will of their delegating councils. Yet in an age of modern communications, the deliberations of each level of council, as well as those between each delegate and their delegating council, could flow back and forth with ease, eliminating much of the guesswork from this type of democratic process and allowing the system to arrive at decisions in a somewhat organic fashion.

The question also arises as to what the purpose of the councils would be at each level of authority. Their purpose, according to Shalom and Macpherson, is to make decisions on local and regional issues, about which higher level councils should have no say. Thus all through the pyramidal structure, the federal principle must be active. Their purpose is not merely to send delegates up the pyramid and debate the issues that should be deliberated at a higher level in face-to-face interactions among those so delegated.

Each level of council must be a deliberative body charged with questions pertaining to its level of authority. Arendt, furthermore, sees two additional possibilities for the councils; that of reducing the ‘mass’ quality of modern society, and that of allowing a participatory political “élite” to emerge, a group of people distinguished from the many that choose not to participate in politics.

It would be tempting to spin out further the potentialities of the councils, but it certainly is wiser to say with Jefferson, “Begin them only for a single purpose; they will soon show for what others they are the best instruments” – the best instruments, for example, for breaking up the modern mass society, with its dangerous tendency toward the formation of pseudo-political mass movements, or rather, the best most natural way for interspersing it at the grass roots with an “élite” that is chosen by no one but constitutes itself. The joys of public happiness and the responsibilities for public business would then become the share of those few from all walks of life who have a taste for public freedom and cannot be “happy” without it. Politically, they are the best, and it is the task of good government and the sign of a well-ordered republic to assure them of their rightful place in the public realm. To be sure, such an “aristocratic” form of government would spell the end of general suffrage as we understand it today; for only those who as voluntary members of an “elementary republic” have demonstrated that they care for more than their private happiness and are concerned about the state of the world have the right to be heard in the conduct of the business of the republic (Arendt, pp. 283-284).

It is not Arendt’s intention that exclusion from politics be forced upon anyone, but rather that those who are not interested should be able to exclude themselves from the political process. Those who do participate are self-chosen, and those who do not participate are self-excluded, and should not be looked down upon. Arendt continues:

And such self-exclusion, far from being arbitrary discrimination, would in fact give substance and reality to one of the most important negative liberties we have enjoyed since the end of the ancient world, namely, freedom from politics, which was unknown to Rome or Athens and which is politically perhaps the most relevant part of our Christian heritage (ibid., p. 284).

Shalom, by contrast, is of a different mind. In his proposal for a participatory polity, all citizens are included in primary-level councils across the whole of society. These councils would number 25-50 persons each, and would be based in people's neighbourhoods or villages. For Shalom, it is enough that people are connected by geographical proximity, and not by functional group (occupation, etc.) or by social interest groups, such as membership in political parties. Shalom lays out his scheme this way:

The number of members on each council would be determined on the basis of a society-wide decision, and perhaps revised on the basis of experience, so as to meet the following criteria: small enough to guarantee that people can be involved in deliberative bodies, where all can participate in face-to-face discussions; but yet big enough so that (1) there is adequate diversity of opinion included; and (2) the number of layers of councils needed to accommodate the entire society is minimized. For example, if all councils have 25 members, then, assuming half the population consists of adults, then 5 layers could accommodate a society of 19 million people; with councils of 40 members, 5 layers could accommodate 200 million people; and 50-person councils could accommodate 625 million people by the fifth level. With a sixth level, even 25-person councils could accommodate a society of about half a billion people (Shalom, subsection 5.3).

Shalom is correct in establishing the size of councils at 25-50 people; this is sufficient for them to be representative of their constituencies, while being small enough for all to participate in debate and deliberation, if they so desire. Higher-level councils, however, regardless of Shalom's vision, may have to be bigger since they may be charged with a wider variety of responsibilities and duties, all of greater importance to a greater number of people, and breaking up councils into a variety of committees may be important. While primary-level councils ought to be small, since they deal with fewer issues, council size ought to grow as it goes up the pyramid, at least to the size of modern

national parliaments. “At least” is used here because it is quite conceivable that a participatory democracy may take more powers and responsibilities into the public realm, necessitating a higher number of delegates to deal with them. On the whole, Shalom’s proposal is fascinating in its simplicity of vision.

However, both Shalom and Arendt neglect or underestimate the continued importance that the concept of representation will have in a participatory democracy. It is perhaps too much to expect that the whole of society will either be active participators or happy self-excluders. A middle ground is necessary. For people who wish not to participate still have the right to have their needs, desires and interests heard. Some people may find participation too difficult for various reasons – old age, youth, ill health, being too busy, and a host of other possibilities. Civil society organizations will continue to exist in a free society, and these organizations (such as political parties) will continue to aggregate and advocate certain social interests. There is no reason why the primary level of popular assemblies or councils should not consist of voluntary organizations in which members basically agree on most political issues, as opposed to being composed of a few dozen people thrown together simply because of their physical proximity to one another. Election of representatives, at least to primary-level councils, may therefore prove to be important and necessary, assuming several factors: (1) The representation is, to the extent possible, descriptive representation, as the concept is defined by Pitkin (see Part One) in order to represent the full diversity of the constituency; (2) they represent a relatively small population, meaning that the number of constituents per representative is relatively low; (3) elections are frequent and allowances are made to allow for turnover of

representatives (e.g., term limits); (4) the councils are sufficiently large to allow maximum participation by those who wish to participate politically.

One possibility to ensure maximum participation in politics under conditions that necessitate some level of representation is to use popular assemblies. Such assemblies, convened regularly or at the request of a local representative council, could be used to gain crucial public feedback into issues of importance. This has echoes of the Athenian democratic system. The difference here is that the assemblies are largely for consultation and public debate, rather than for final decision-making. This is because, in a free society, assemblies will be for the most part composed of self-selecting citizens and thus not necessarily representative in terms of popular opinion and interest. Elected councils, on the other hand, while more representative, are less participatory. For the popular will to be manifested, it is likely that some combination of the two – assemblies and councils – may be necessary at the base level.

Machover's Model of Participatory Democracy

In his paper “Collective Decision-Making and Supervision in a Communist Society”, Moshé Machover envisions an institutional structure for a system of participatory democracy functioning in the context of a post-capitalist world. Machover notes that while thinkers should be cautious about drawing up “blueprints” for a socialist world, it is nonetheless necessary for progressive political thinkers at least to have proposals and ideas about what a desirable political system might look like, based as much as possible on the experiences of the past, both positive and negative. Machover writes:

[S]ocialists have devoted far too scant attention to the question as to how communist society is to function. There is little detailed discussion of the institutional framework that a communist commonwealth might use for making collective decisions and supervising their implementation. The relatively few discourses that do exist in the socialist literature are, for the most part, very sketchy; perhaps worse, they depend on extremely utopian assumptions – more often than not unstated – about communist society (Machover, pp. 2-3).

Such utopian assumptions include, for instance, the notion that simply because capitalism has disappeared, that questions of organization will somehow resolve themselves, no longer being subject to the politics of class conflict. But reality is complex; for wide-ranging collective (and political) decisions to take place there must be an institutional framework in which such decisions can be made and carried out. Such a framework does not materialize out of thin air, but is the product of human deliberation and agency. Machover therefore bases his proposals on a series of principles he claims are constitutive of democratic decision-making. Enumerated, they are:

1. *Sovereignty of the people.* The power of making decisions concerning the running of society belongs collectively to the people constituting that society. Decisions not made by the whole community still derive their authority from its mandate.
2. *Empowerment of the people.* Any dilution of the people's power, such as indirect decision-making, must be minimized.
3. *Universal suffrage.* Everyone in the community must be allowed to vote, though perhaps with some demarcation of age. Another important type of demarcation is *subsidiarity*. People must be allowed to determine what part of a society is subject to a decision, and thus who gets to take part in it. Subsidiarity allows for a fair degree of decentralized decision-making and local autonomy. Such

decentralization may be determined geographically (regions and municipalities) or functionally (occupations, workplaces or enterprises).

4. *Equal suffrage*. When a decision is being made by delegates or representatives, voting should be weighted according to the size of the constituency represented. Otherwise, some citizens would effectively have more voting power than others. Alternatively, the number of delegates per constituency may vary.
5. *Majority rule*. Majority votes should be sufficient to carry a decision. However, Machover cautions against the unrestricted use of this principle for two reasons:

First, certain minority interests and preferences ought to be protected against being overridden; otherwise, the result may be an oppressive dictatorship by the majority. Second, some fundamental aspects of the status quo (such as constitutional ground rules) ought to be privileged and protected against being overturned by a slim majority margin: otherwise, the result may be great instability, with far-reaching changes being all too easily made and just as easily overturned (*ibid.*, p. 7).

Despite the importance Machover places on popular sovereignty in the sphere of collective decision-making, he acknowledges that direct democratic measures, such as referenda, have important limitations. While he asserts that decisions involving the whole of society should resort to referenda as frequently as possible, he recognizes that only a small proportion of collective decisions can realistically be made by referendum. He states:

[O]nly a small proportion of collective decisions can be made [by referendum]. For one thing, a referendum is suited to deciding relatively brief, clear and simple questions, not complex resolutions. But the main reason is more basic: the limitation of time. In a typical national bourgeois parliament, several hundred votes are taken each year. In a communist commonwealth, the number of decisions that will have to be made at a national level will no doubt be greater, because ... many more issues will be subject to collective decision-making. To this must be added decisions at other levels: local, regional and – let us not forget – supra-national. All

in all, the collective decisions that affect any given citizen and in which s/he ought therefore to have some say will, at a reasonably conservative estimate, number many hundreds, perhaps a few thousand, per year. If all collective decisions were to be made directly, then every conscientious citizen would have to engage in voting continually: it would become more than a full-time occupation, to the exclusion of any other social or private activity. And there would hardly be time for proper discussion of the issues being decided or for due consideration of the arguments pro and con, or for exchange of information on the factual and technical background needed for forming a well-founded opinion. If put in such a position, most normal people would react by abstaining altogether, or by voting in a haphazard and capricious way. Thus decisions would actually be made by a self-selecting clique of busybodies and an ill-informed and so easily misled mass. This would make a mockery of democracy (Machover, p. 8).

Thus Machover believes that referenda, while playing an important role in a participatory democracy, should be confined to a relatively small number of major issues, such as constitutional questions, or where a sufficient number of citizens actively demand a referendum (ibid., p. 9). Machover makes reference to the Swiss experience of popular referenda. While this aspect of Swiss political culture is well-entrenched, and part of a long and cherished tradition, he reports that the high number of referenda conducted has caused citizens to become weary and apathetic with this instrument of direct democracy:

[T]here are a number of indications that the frequency of national referenda, as well as the number of propositions put to referendum, cannot be increased much further without adverse effects. Already, the level of Swiss citizens' participation in referenda is worrying [sic] low: in the 10-year period 1999-2008, the average turnout rate was approximately 45% (ibid., p. 10).

In terms of the preferred structure of a communist participatory democracy, Machover basically approves of the pyramidal council model described by Shalom above. Machover believes it has the distinct advantages of promoting social cohesion and active participation at the grassroots level (ibid., p. 13). He also offers, however, a

compelling sociological critique of the council pyramid. First, a citizen is not merely a member of a local constituency or functional group, but also a member of a society at large. Some decisions, for instance, involve the whole of society and need to be taken at the national or supra-national level. “For some such decisions,” Machover writes, “local or sectoral interests and viewpoints are relevant, and so it is reasonable for citizens to be represented through a structure that reflects their local or functional affiliation. But there are surely some national-level decisions for which these affiliations are either irrelevant, or should be ignored, even overruled, in order to prevent special pleading (ibid., p. 14).”

Second, while the council pyramid encourages the active participation of citizens at the grassroots level, it also depends on this same participation for the system to function properly. If apathy or passivity permeates the structure, the system can be controlled by a small self-selecting activist minority.

Machover has a technical critique of the council pyramid as well. A council system may in fact distort the will of citizens as a decision moves up the pyramid. For example, imagine a two-tier decision-making structure in which the higher council has 12 members, each mandated by a base-level council of citizens. If 7 of the 12 base-level mandate their delegates to vote ‘yes’ on a question, the ‘yes’ will carry the vote. However, if these base level councils each voted ‘yes’ with 60% of the vote on average, and the 5 ‘no’ councils each voted ‘yes’ with only 20%, then the average approval for the question at the base level was only 43.3%. This would in fact be a ‘no’ response if all citizens simply voted together on the question. (This example assumes each council represents an equal number of citizens.)

As a remedy for this situation, Machover recommends that democratic parliaments have a bicameral structure (*ibid.*, p. 22). One house should be composed of delegates of the lower-level councils, representing people in their collective interests; the other house should be composed of representatives elected to represent people in their individual interests. The latter house would be similar to the lower houses of most legislatures currently, except that Machover recommends an assembly that exhibits descriptive representation (though he does not specifically use Pitkin's language). Machover thinks this can be arrived at through some sort of election using proportional representation, and that this is all a bourgeois society will tolerate; he thus assumes the existence of a diversity of parties that represent various interests (*ibid.*, p. 25). Nonetheless, his preference for a communist society involves a system of selection by lottery, being a more just and suitable method for such a society (see Machover, pp. 29-33). This system echoes the use of lot by ancient Athens for selecting many of its magistrates. It is through the bicameral structure of legislatures that these bodies achieve a balance between the popular will in terms of collective interests and the popular will in terms of individual interests. Overall, Machover's proposal for a democratic decision-making structure is fascinating in that it combines many of the principles, ideas and concepts we have dealt with in this thesis, and therefore deserves more discussion on the political left than it has received so far.

Conclusion

Establishing participatory democracy, as we have seen in Part One, is both a humanist project and a proletarian class project. The need and demand for participatory

democracy emerges out of the innate capacities of human beings as individuals and as social beings; thus the foundation for participatory democracy lies not just in a critique of representative democracy as it exists today. Rather, this foundation is ontological in nature, proceeding as it does from the need for non-alienated ways of being in the world, and from the inherent species-being of humanity.

In the modern world, the model that a participatory democracy would have to assume in order to exceed the potential of Athenian-type democracy is the pyramidal council system, as shown in Part Two. The details of this model have been reviewed in some detail. That said, however, blueprints and schemas are no substitute for the real institutional forms and structures that take shape and emerge in the course of the struggle for a better, more just world. Nevertheless, the pyramidal council system is sufficient to transmit the political will of the citizenry to the top levels of regional, national and global authority in a way that is responsive to the interests and voices of the people. As a political proposal, it must be placed on the table by progressive political actors. To the extent that the people are incapable, unwilling or uninterested in full participation, some second best option must come into effect. In this case, participation must be supported by descriptive representation. Descriptive representation, with its caveats, also has the advantage that, by assisting the council system, the two systems can in conjunction produce more accurate representation of the interests, desires and will of the general population.

The subject of this thesis has been democracy and the institutional structures necessary to allow for mass popular participation in the politics of the state. Very little has been discussed concerning ideas such as individual rights and freedoms. Democracy

and freedom tend to coexist, but they are not the same thing. A theme throughout this thesis, one could say, is the classical notion of freedom, which was to be a participator in the affairs of the state. This kind of positive liberty need not be a threat to the negative liberties modern liberal democracies hold so dear; rather they can complement each other, even enhance one another. For it is democracy that is the surest guarantor of negative liberties, of people's rights and freedoms; this is what modern history has proven. It is thus conceivable that participatory democracy would expand the basket of rights and freedoms that human beings possess, leading to a new realm of freedom and human potential. Social, economic and cultural rights are weakly protected in liberal democracies compared to the negative liberties. A new paradigm in government is therefore needed for individuals and societies to achieve their full potential. Therefore, progressive political forces and actors should adopt participatory democracy as part of their programs for change. As human labour becomes more and more obsolete, the potential for mass participation in public affairs becomes a real possibility. In general, people are never opposed to *more* democracy; the political left should seize this opportunity and call for participatory democracy.

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