

Electoral Legitimation, Polyarchy, and Democratic Legitimacy¹

As a concept, democracy is notoriously prone to a multiplicity of interpretations. The definition of democracy is contested, perhaps not “essentially” so in any technical sense, but hotly contested nonetheless. (Gallie 1957; Connolly 1974; Hurley 1989: 46-50). Take, for instance, the disputation over the meaning and practical implications of the concept during the recent historical era of global Cold War. The anticommunist intelligentsia concocted a dichotomy between ‘liberal democracy’ and ‘totalitarianism’ to distinguish the good regimes of the ‘Free World’ from the evil, freedom-infringing regimes of one-party socialist states. (e.g., Brzezinski & Friedrich 1965). The antiauthoritarian intelligentsia critical of both illiberal one-party rule and capitalist modes of domination, for its part, distinguished ‘bourgeois’ or ‘capitalist’ democracy from the ‘real’ or ‘socialist’ democracy that elections under universal adult suffrage makes possible. (e.g., MacPherson 1972, Cohen & Rogers 1983).

Writing in the wake of the end of the Cold War, Honderich (1994) still distinguished between the ‘hierarchic’ democracy of the more economically developed capitalist national states and the ‘egalitarian’ democracy that constitutionally privileges socioeconomic sufficiency and equality. I share the view that what passes for ‘democracy’ in the contemporary world is far from delivering on the promise of egalitarian social relations which people throughout the world rightly associate with the idea. It would be both historically ironic and politically sad if the fall of the Soviet Union should result in the rhetorical disarmament of the antiauthoritarian intelligentsia vis-à-vis the defenders of a pluriversal world order of capitalist national states. (e.g., Fukuyama 1989, 1992; Huntington 1990, 1996). Rather than disparage or deligitimate the aspiration to socioeconomic egalitarianism popularly associated with democracy, we need to continue to criticize the existing political order for its insufficiently democratic structures. To be sure, in order to be prudent in this pursuit, a clear distinction has to be

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made between the morally valuable *minimal features* of democratic rule and the dimensions of social life still wanting in democratization. At the same time, as it turns out, the main rationale for positively valuing the minimal features of democratic rule in modern states also explains why such features do not exhaustively capture democracy's meaning.

Indeed, the purpose of this paper is to defend the view democracy stands or falls with the idea of moral equality, a notion that establishes a strong presumption that the only legitimate status differentials between human beings have to be the expression of their 'basal' moral equality. (cf. Sen 1992; also, Frankena 1962; Flathman 1967; Dahl 1989). Moral equality entails fundamental political equality, which is the reason we value *inclusive*, free, competitive elections of national states' legislatures, rather than elections by some subset of countries' adult populations. Moral equality also entails fundamental social and economic equality. (cf. Dahl 1989). Electoral legitimization of public government, in the context of legally constituted and enabled systemic structures of social and economic inequality is not the end-point of democracy's promise. Fighters for and defenders of democracy around the world continue to soundly criticize, *in the name of democracy*, the existing structural patterns of wealth distribution and concentration of power. There is no incoherence in positively valuing the institutions that make up the minimal features of democracy and claiming that democracy itself demands egalitarian structures in addition to those minimal features. Moral equality is the normative thread that ties these two positions together.

My argument takes the form of a critical attack on the notion of democracy most prevalent in contemporary mass-media and social science discourse on the topic. In my view, contemporary mass media and social science pander an unduly deflated conception of democracy's meaning, a conception that delinks it entirely (or, with less imprudence, almost entirely) from the substantive practical implications of moral equality. Most of my discussion consists of a critique of an essay by Adam Przeworski (1999) which attempts to explicitly and completely delink democracy from equality. Within the

discussant at that event, and I would like to also thank him for his comments and post-panel conversation. The usual caveats apply, of course, and revisions are in process....

spectrum of possible deflated views of democracy, the notion proposed by Przeworski stands out as an extreme instance, but it is therefore telling for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, my demonstration of why Przeworski's proposal fails highlights vividly the necessary conceptual links between equality and democracy.

To make explicit the extremity of Przeworski's view, it will be helpful to place it within a map of possible strategies of definitional deflation. Consider a definition meant to pick out the main characteristics of a modern political regime of a distinctive sort:

- Meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power through regular, free, and fair elections that exclude the use of force.
- A highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, such that no major (adult) social group is prevented from exercising the rights of citizenship.
- A level of civil and political liberties—freedom of thought and expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and demonstration, freedom to form and join organizations, freedom from terror and justified imprisonment—secured through political equalization under a rule of law, sufficient to ensure that citizens (acting individually and through various associations) can develop and advocate their view and interests and contest policies and offices vigorously and autonomously. (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1995: 6-7))

What type of political regime is this? What should we call or name such a regime? The authors from whom the definition is extracted say that its definiendum is 'democracy'. But the definition is a summary gloss on the regime traits which R. A. Dahl (1971) designates with the term 'polyarchy'. Let us keep open the question of the relationship between polyarchy and democracy. For now at least, let us just say that this definition picks out the jointly necessary features of a polyarchy. Polyarchy is a concept meant to pick out national state regimes that are characterized by highly inclusive levels of participation in elections and highly competitive contestation for public office. The two dimensions—inclusiveness and public contestation—can of course help analyze the

organization of power at sub-national and supranational levels, as well as the organization of power in political parties and social institutions such as churches, families, schools, and business firms.² But Dahl (1971) introduced the term in political science with an eye to focusing on the regime organization of national states.³

There are several reasons for choosing an unfamiliar term for the categorization of familiar modes of political organization. A most important one is to avoid endowing existing political arrangements with the legitimizing normative force of familiar political ideals. In the case of democracy, such avoidance is particularly appropriate. For the very idea of democracy suggests that the degree to which power complexes are organized democratically enough is something that ought only to be determined democratically. This is not an appropriate domain of issues to expect the authority of scientific expertise to decide. Indeed, it is undemocratic to pretend that social science has decisively superior cognitive authority over such issues.

Adam Przeworski (1999) seems to disagree. His “Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense” is an instructive essay as an attempt to formulate an evaluatively meaningful concept of democracy which is fit for describing the structural mechanisms of political life in modern ‘democratic’ states. He states his aim (p 23) to defend Schumpeter’s conception both as an empirical description and also as positively valuable because it is a “system in which citizens can get rid of governments without bloodshed”. I believe this aim itself is misguided because it assumes that the very same concept can serve the analytical imperatives of social scientific description of present-day political

² I make this clarification to register my adherence to the view that a commitment to democracy in our time means, in substantial part, a commitment to a cosmopolitical account of the proper way to ascertain the level of operation at which it should function. I believe that the confinement of democratic moral-political logic to the interior of bounded national states is a truncation. The reason why the very idea of democracy entails that its best level of operation is global has to do with the objective moral-political reasons for valuing democracy, and for preferring it to other logics for organizing social power. The moral equality of human beings demands global democracy.

³ Actually, the term was introduced originally by Dahl and C. E. Lindblom (1953) in an oft-neglected general social theory, applicable to all domains of society. The term’s main conceptual impact, however, has been as an analytical tool for the comparative study of the governmental institutions of national states and their internal subdivisions (especially cities). Dahl and Lindblom, on the other hand, have kept true – albeit in different ways – to their original vision, and they can be counted as two of the relatively few political scientists in the U.S. who describe and evaluate the government structures of so-called ‘civil society’ or ‘private life’ as well as political life more narrowly conceived. See, e.g. Dahl (1985) and Lindblom (1977).

structures and also capture the full meaning of democracy.⁴ The aim is parasitic on a prior judgment that at least a portion of the world's national states whose governing classes claim to be genuine democracies are, in fact, genuine democracies. Such a judgment, as Skinner (1973) pointed out deftly, is thoroughly conservative and apologetic of the political status quo in capitalist polyarchies. Given the tremendous stature of democracy as a value in political life at the turn of the 21st century, however, the opposite judgment is as thoroughly ideological. (Some judgment or action is ideological to the extent that it takes sides, implicitly or explicitly, on the legitimacy or value of its subject.) In this day and age, to claim of a political entity that it is not a democracy or that it is not sufficiently democratized is, *ceteris paribus*, to claim that it is defective in a very important respect. A national state, in particular, is by nearly all post-W.W.II accounts, presumptively illegitimate to the extent that it is wanting of democratic organization. There is, therefore, no ideology-neutral definition of democracy. Today, a particular definition of democracy chosen for purposes of social science or political argument does, implicitly but directly, either legitimize or condemn the world's prevailing structures of social power.

Przeworski, to be sure, is aware that the enterprise of defining democracy is unavoidably ideological, and that Schumpeter's definition is a particularly infamous instance of a description of modern states loaded with conservative ideological effect.⁵ He contrasts his strategy for dealing with this fact to Dahl's (1971). Before proceeding into the details of Przeworski's argument strategy it will be good, therefore, to display the

⁴ My claim here is based on the judgment that *the prevailing structures of power in the world today are so evidently inegalitarian* that they render chimerical any definition of democracy that purports to describe them and also to signify the entirety or core of democracy's meaning. This is not to say that it is impossible or unlikely that the world will become such *that the very same concept could describe it and also signify democracy's meaning*. When and if the world were to become substantially more egalitarian than the structural forces that reign today, then we may be able to 'operationalize' a true definition of democracy. Until such a time, which is perhaps long in the distant future or perhaps just beyond our immediate horizons, 'operationalizable' conceptions of democracy will strike most democrats as false.

⁵ Indeed, when Skinner (1973) exposed the linguistic-pragmatic mechanism by which the 'empirical theorists' of democracy play a conservative role in political argument, he counted Schumpeter as one of the few who go so far as to flatly deny that democracy *denotes* 'rule by the people'. More than a couple of decades since Skinner's exposé, the Schumpeterian denial of a conceptual truth is unproblematically accepted in large bodies of academic scholarship, while the 'critics' of the 'empirical theorists' are silenced as the real-world central institutions of more and more national states become subject to

logic of the alternative Dahl suggests, and to remember a few things about the nature of defining.

Dahl (1971) chose the name Polyarchy for non-hegemonic regimes that operate within a subset of the world's national states. While one may agree with much of Schumpeter's description of these regimes, one may still use the label 'polyarchy' to classify them. 'Polyarchy' is preferable by comparison to the more popular and politically loaded 'democracy' if one disbelieves that today's real world states are 'fully democratized' or 'as democratized as they should be'. What are the possible grounds for making such a judgment? As a conceptual matter, appeal has to be made to a *literal definition* of democracy. In particular, the appeal is to the idea of 'rule by the people', the exact etymologically derivable denotation of the term 'democracy'. A literal definition can be thought of as responsive to the question 'What is X?'. The relation between a literal definiens and its definiendum is analytical, though it need not specify a list of necessary and sufficient features. Indeed, certainly at least in the case of complex and evolving social kinds, a literal definiens ought to be open-ended and only specify a cluster or 'family' of features that obtain in particular cases subsumable under the definiendum. The standard of adequacy for a literal definiens is soundness, the cogent depiction of the features referred to by the definiendum. In contrast, a *nominal definition* is responsive to the question 'What should we call or name X?'. The relation between a nominal definiens and its definiendum is stipulative. Like a literal definiens, a nominal definiens does not have to specify a list of necessary and sufficient conditions. Social scientists, however, use closed-list nominal definitions for purposes of research, analysis and argument in order to make causal claims based on statistical correlations and other modes of induction structurally analogous to correlations. Closed-list nominal definitions enable students of society to ensure that the 'independent variable' in their research design is truly independent from the 'dependent variable'. The 'empirical theorists' criticized by Skinner (1973) utilized a so-called 'operational' nominal definition of democracy without abandoning the claim that the cases subsumable under its definiendum were genuine cases of 'rule by the people'. The literal definition of

mechanisms of multiparty-electoral legitimation, unaccompanied by guarantees of social, economic, or even strictly civil and political equality.

democracy as traditionally and commonly understood, ‘rule by the people’, properly put substantive denotational constraints on the empirical theorists’ understanding of the conceptual status of their nominal definitions. Dahl (1971) disagreed with the judgment that any of the then-existing national states were structured in such a way as to make them genuine cases of ‘rule by the people’, and he therefore used the term “polyarchy” to ensure the independence of his dependent ‘variable’ without endowing the regimes classifiable as polyarchies with the legitimating normative force conferred in the modern imagination by the idea of democracy.

Przeworski’s argument strategy, by contrast, simply assumes that ‘rule by the people’ does not constitute a real substantive constraint on the set of plausible nominal definitions of democracy: He agrees with Schumpeter’s description of electorally legitimated nonhegemonic regimes and argues that they should be called ‘democracies’ even though they are not genuine cases of ‘rule by the people’. What warrants this audacious plea to change our understanding of democracy’s denotation? Leaving aside for now strategic considerations having to do with marshaling support for, and conviction in, the merits of what little of democracy’s promise has already been achieved in our world, and also leaving aside the purely intellectual imperatives of certain styles of social inquiry prevalent in contemporary academic practice, the substance and logic of the argument is basically this:

- 1) Competitive Elections are the principal characteristic of modern nonhegemonic regimes.
- 2) Competitive elections have moral-political value because they causally generate the peaceful resolution of social conflicts.
- 3) The peaceful resolution of social conflicts is so weighty a value that, many things considered—particularly the absence of causal links between elections and economic equality, political representation, and social rationality--, elections are very much “worth defending” nonetheless.
- 4) The definition of democracy, therefore, is a system in which rulers are selected by competitive elections.

So stated, this argument seems clear enough. But it falls short of a solution to the problem of how to construct a conception that is both operationalizable in application to contemporary national states and also expresses democracy’s real value basis. The reasons it falls short are instructive, however, and grasping them opens up an avenue for

understanding the specificity and nature of, as well as the relationship between electoral legitimation, polyarchy and democracy.

As I said, Przeworski's argument as simplified above *seems* clear enough. There are ambiguities, however, about both the minimal conception and about the putative minimalist defense at issue. The "defense" is no defense at all, but rather a deconstruction, for, as Przeworski puts it himself, "the minimalist defense of the minimal conception breaks down." (p 24). One of the reasons the defense breaks down stems from the ambiguities of the conception itself.⁶ In particular, as to the conception's content, it is not clear whether Przeworski means to conceptualize minimalist democracy as including all three features of Polyarchy, or whether it only includes the first feature—competitive elections. (For example, Przeworski calls the USA the "world's oldest democracy", suggesting that full inclusion and equality of civil and political liberties are not part of the definition: the US could not be classified as a Polyarchy until the 1960's at the earliest, much later than several other polyarchies. See Dahl (1971) and Therborn (1977) for the correct classification of the USA⁷)

As to the conception's form, it is not clear whether Przeworski really means to proffer a *minimal* definition in contradistinction to an *exhaustive* definition of democracy. Indeed, the latter appears to be the case, so that the essay might be better thought of as a deconstructed minimalist defense of an exhaustive, albeit barely inspiring, conception of

⁶ Another reason the defense breaks down is the peculiarly narrow and atomistic notion of value that practically guides Przeworski's inferences from causal propositions to definitional claims about the value concept at issue, democracy. I discuss this below. Yet another reason, the one explicitly registered by Przeworski himself, is that a system of selecting government leaders through elections "endures only under some conditions. Elections alone are not sufficient for conflicts to be resolved through elections. And while some of these conditions are economic, others are political and institutional." (34). It is notable that per capita income is the principal predictor of whether an electoral system of legitimation survives in a country. If the empirical stability of an historically realized aspect of a political ideal probably depends on a certain level of per capita income, there is hardly any reason not to say that that level of per capita income is a practical imperative of the political ideal. Labeling the relevant social condition, in this case per capita income, an 'exogenous' condition is an arbitrary way to block the definitional association of the political ideal, in this case Democracy, and the social condition. Just as people throughout the world definitionally associate Democracy with socioeconomic equality, they also associate it with socioeconomic sufficiency. I believe the high predictive relationship between per capita income and the survival rates of systemic electoral legitimation should be seen as objective evidence in support of the popular view that Democracy entails a certain absolute socioeconomic minima.

⁷ The decisive evidence piercing the democratic shell of 'American' racist Electoralist Hegemony is expounded by Key (1949) and Kousser (1974). Arguably, expanding and concretizing this angle of vision, the U.S. is still not yet a Polyarchy: See Davis (1992), Domhoff (1999), and Rae (1999).

democracy. These ambiguities are important for social science scholarship and in light of the broader political landscape. They enable the mistake that the contemporary academic jargon labels ‘the electoralist fallacy’—the supposition that the practice of electoral legitimization is a sufficient feature of democracy’s minimum.⁸ The realistic real minimum of democracy in the contemporary world is Polyarchy, not electoral legitimization alone.⁹

⁸ The contemporary academic literature that grapples with the empirical analysis of contemporary political regimes is very divided on this issue. See Collier & Mahon Jr. (1993) and Collier & Levitsky (1997) for an indication of the many ways in which social scientists define democracy, and a general theoretical argument justifying a variety of minima less demanding than Polyarchy. In an unpublished paper (Hacker-Cordón 1997), I undermine this argument by proposing a specific category, Electoralist Hegemony, to pick out and organize our knowledge of regimes in which elections are regularly held but the other elementary features of Polyarchy are lacking. In one of the most comprehensive and insightful accounts of the most recent era of regime transformations in the world, Linz & Stepan (1996) employ a pragmatically justified in-kind positive definition of democracy carefully tailored to avoid the ‘electoralist fallacy’. Motivated by similar considerations, Zakaria (1997) discusses the importance of not making a panacea fetish out of electoral legitimization from the normative vantage point of liberalizing ‘foreign policy’. These contributions are sound insofar as the stress is on avoiding the electoralist fallacy, as I’ve argued in the previously mentioned chapter. My disagreement with these writings stems from the tendency to assert that democracy’s institutional minima is identical with its maxima, and that, once a regime qualifies as a Polyarchy, all desirable changes of its dynamics are matter having to do with improving the “quality” of an already fully-fledged democracy rather than a matter of further democratization. This is not a merely terminological flaw. It is a conceptual issue with serious political implications, specifically having to do with monopolizing the inspirational and action-guiding force of democracy for purposes of legitimizing a states system composed of polyarchically governed national states. Such an arbitrary deflation of democratic aspiration, though less extreme than that propounded by Przeworski, can be resisted on grounds that are strictly conceptual and theoretical --without invoking any particular political agenda. The argument below on the structural form of the concept of democracy applies just as much to Linz & Stepan (1996) and Zakaria (1997) as it does to Przeworski (1999).

⁹ The issue of avoiding getting the minima of democracy wrong is not only germane to the general prospects of socialism to immanently piggy-back on allegiance to democracy; it is also crucial to the debate within liberal democracy about the proper way to conceive the socio structural requirements of *democratic* elections as in, for example, the issue of campaign financing in the U.S.A. The establishment of Polyarchy as an accepted minima in the U.S.A. and elsewhere has led many academics to question the synergy of capitalism and democracy, e.g. Block (1977), Lindblom (1977), Cohen and Rogers (1983), Manley (1983), Fiss (1986) and Bowles and Gintis (1987). And there is even discussion, starting from Polyarchy as minima of democracy, of conceiving socialism as ‘the extension of democracy’. (Cohen 1993, Arneson 1994). Less sanguine about the incompatibility between capitalism and democracy Dahl (1985) argues for the internal democratization of business firms, which presumably could continue to be driven by profit-maximization in *capitalist* markets. Many of these writings of the 1970s and 80s do not accept Polyarchy itself, much less electoral legitimization alone, as sufficient minima of democracy. In the 1990s’, a time of world-historical transformation, and its attendant modifications of institutional visions and normative expectations, the strategic orientation of Left democratic theory turned to limiting the scope and consequential effects of capitalist markets., in less radically participationist ways than the idea of ‘economic democracy’ as in e. g. Cohen & Rogers (1996), and Shapiro (1999). And socialist theory has undergone a rejuvenation of the idea of market socialism. (Miller 1989; Blackburn 1991; Bardhan & Roemer eds. 1993; cf. also Nove 1983). As Roemer’s (1994, 1999) work illustrates, the idea of market socialism is compatible with a ‘procedural’ conception of democracy’s sufficient minima, such as

To clarify the issues, consider some propositions:

- M1. Elections are a necessary feature of the modern democratic ideal.
- M2. Competitive elections are a necessary feature of the modern democratic ideal.
- M3. Free and fair competitive elections are a necessary feature of modern democracy.

It is unlikely that even advocates of 20th century inclusive hegemonies,¹⁰ such as the Soviet Union, would disagree with M1. Highly inclusive elections are regularly held in Soviet-type hegemonies. Likewise, it is unlikely that M2 would be rejected by any self-proclaimed democrat. What counts as ‘competitive’ (e.g. does it have to involve multiple parties or is contestation within a single party enough?) may cause some controversy, but there is substantial agreement that elections should be competitive. Even M3 is an unlikely object of dispute among most people, at least after the 1990s. There may be much interesting disagreement about how to spell out the characteristics of freedom and fairness which qualify electoral competition. But there is no significant disagreement about the claim that, on a suitable spelling-out, freedom and fairness are necessary qualities of democratic elections. M1, M2, and M3 are conceptually uncontroversial because they specify merely *necessary features* of modern democracy.

Consider two other propositions, this time conceptually controversial ones:

- M4. Competitive elections are a sufficient feature of modern democracy.
- M5. Free and fair competitive elections are a sufficient feature... .

Both M4 and M5 are, in one way, more minimal than Polyarchy because they make no reference to inclusive participation or to equal protection of civil and political freedoms. In another way, however, both M4 and M5 are less minimal than Polyarchy because they

Polyarchy. The non-domination subsumption of a constitutionally limited capitalist property system, whether as proposed by Cohen & Rogers or by Shapiro, requires that democracy’s sufficient minima be reconceptualized as to include *certain socioeconomic structures in addition to Polyarchy*. Przeworski, on the other hand, is no doubt skeptical about either of these attempts to establish minima that go beyond Polyarchy. Instead, the idea that concerns him is that democracy is less than Polyarchy, not more; that, in more exact words, electoral legitimation alone constitutes the sufficient minimum and maximum of democracy.

¹⁰ Note that here I again follow the basic lines of Dahl’s (1971) categorial framework for the analysis of contemporary national states. The regimes of these states vary in the dimension of public contestation along a continuum from ‘hegemony’ (low) to ‘polyarchy’ (high).

specify a single institutional feature as potentially *exhaustive* of the meaning of modern democracy. In this sense, of course, there is an even less minimal pair of controversial propositions:

M6. Competitive elections are the necessary and sufficient feature of modern democracy.

M7. Free and fair competitive elections are the necessary and sufficient feature... .

While both M6 and M7, like M4 and M5, are more minimal than Polyarchy in terms of their definitional content, they purport to specify the unique institutional feature which exclusively exhausts the meaning of the modern democratic ideal. As definitional forms, then, M6 and M7 purport to do more conceptual explanation than any of the other possible Minimalist propositions; these are *exclusively exhaustive definitional forms*. Of all these propositions, due to their exclusivity, M6 and M7 are the only two which are in (partial) contradiction with each other (if M7 is true, then M6 is partially inaccurate, and vice versa). Stated in terms of these propositions, the burden of my argument is that while M1, M2, and M3 are uncontroversially true, M4, M5, M6, and M7 are false in part for the same reason --to be elaborated below-- that D=P (the identification of democracy and polyarchy) is false: Polyarchy is the minima of democracy, but it is only the minima and it cannot exhaust the promise and expectation of democracy.

I have just now distinguished definitional contents from definitional forms and suggested that the minimalism of Minimalist propositions varies along both dimensions. In terms of definitional content all seven Minimalist propositions are more minimalist than Polyarchy—they all specify less institutional properties of the regime they describe than Polyarchy does. Suppose, however, that “free and fair” in M3, M5, and M7 practically refers (at least in part) to the second and third features of Polyarchy— inclusive participation and equal protection of civil and political freedoms. This suggests the following proposition:

D=P Free and fair competitive elections, inclusive participation and equal protection of civil and political freedoms are the jointly sufficient features of modern democracy.

D=P is the view of Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1995: 5-6). It is adamantly not the view of Mangabeira Unger (1987) and Dahl (1989), and I strongly believe they are right about its falsehood. To be sure, for time-bound pragmatic purposes of constructing a threshold-criterial line for distinguishing nondemocratic regime types, the institutions of Polyarchy are an eminently sensible candidate for designating the minimal features of democracy. Minimal features, in the strict sense of necessary features, however, should not be conflated with sufficient features. There are compelling democratic normative reasons, moreover, to reject the very idea that *sufficient* features of the modern democratic ideal can be specified. As a well-considered historical viewpoint suggests, democracy is an unfinished journey. (Dunn ed. 1992; also, Held 1996, and Markoff 1997). It may indeed be unfinishable. Unfinishable perhaps due to how the exclusionary boundaries established through social structures suffer, over time, deficits in democratic legitimacy by rendering practically insatiable the human drive against structural hierarchy.¹¹ Such a transcendental fact about democracy, however, might be something to feel frustrated about, but it should not be imagined away, certainly not in the current world-historical conjuncture of Neoliberal-capitalist ascendancy. In these circumstances, as in all conceivable within the imaginative presuppositions of a genuinely open society, to essay an exhaustive definition of democracy is a serious error in historical and moral judgment.

While Przeworski aims to formulate a duly minimal definitional content for his Minimalist Conception, he unfortunately aims at *exhaustivism* of definitional form. Indeed, the structure of the question he asks us to ponder is ‘Assuming that *all that goes to make up democracy is* the regular holding of elections (competitive, free and fair, or otherwise), why should we nonetheless value it very highly?’ More precisely, *are there*

¹¹ This general idea of democracy as potentially unfinishable due to its open-endedness is supported within certain important streams of contemporary political thought with which I am in sympathy. For example, Mangabeira Unger (1984, 1987), draws on the existentialist ontology of Sartre to conceptualize a deeply democratic view of the malleability of social structure. Connolly (1987, 1991) draws on Habermas, Foucault and Nietzsche’s reflections, among others, to argue for a democracy that contests its own closures by practices of resistance to dogmatization and quiescence. In a more sober vein, Dunn (1979 and elsewhere) suggests that the seemingly limitless demands of democracy have their source in the chief metaphysical characteristic of human beings, the ubiquity of our freedom. However much this modernist motif may be unsound, as we must sometimes think precisely because we do not know the extent of our unfreedom, the very fact that democracy could already in the 1950’s be considered a prime example of an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie 1957), is enough to establish a presumption against the possibility of establishing an ‘institutional maximum’ of what democracy requires.

any reasons aside from their intrinsic value, to positively value elections? Three considerations make it important to note this more precise formulation of the issue.

First, Przeworski tacitly assumes that if some such consequential value-reasons can be given to positively value elections, then elections would exhaustively define democracy. This is the key unstated false assumption in Przeworski's equivocal identification of the conceptual issue of democracy's definition with the causal issue of elections' systemic social effects. Even if some positive value reasons can be given to endorse elections, that would not establish elections as the exclusive definitional feature of democracy. Indeed, such proffered value-reasons—whether consequentialist in structure like Przeworski's candidates, or intrinsic—would not by themselves establish elections as even part of democracy's minima. The question 'What is democracy?' cannot be answered by an analysis of 'What good things, if any, do elections cause systemically?' The latter question could inform another question, 'What is the value of democracy?', to the extent that elections are in fact definitional of democracy. The relevance of elections' systemic consequences to the question of democracy's value could only be shown by demonstrating either an endogenous connection between these electorally-caused 'good things' and democracy or a conceptual relation between elections and democracy. Influential candidate demonstrations of this relation are available within the Rousseau-to-Habermas tradition of envisioning legitimate public order as a sort of well-reasoned consensus.¹² Przeworski emphatically rejects this

¹² This tradition is in substantial academic vogue in the U.S.A. in the prominent form of the idea of "deliberative democracy", thanks not only to Habermas's elaboration of its tenets and development of social-theoretic micro- and macro- foundations for its empirical analysis, but also to Pocock's influential writings on republican political thought in the U.S.A.. (Habermas 1975, 1984, 1987, 1996; Pocock 1975). Some of the principal writings in the development of this idea within contemporary normative political theory are collected in Bohman (1997), together with the proceedings from one of several recent conferences on it. The notion of deliberative democracy is strenuously distinguished by its proponents from the related but different notion of contractualist legitimacy. The distinction is based on the different role which common practical reason plays in the two conceptions of legitimacy. See, inter alia, Ackerman (1980), Guttman (1993), and Habermas (1993). For an argument from other sources to the same conclusion, compare Hurley (1989). From a strictly consequentialist view of the possible value of interaction processes, however, the notion of deliberative democracy and the old 18th century notion of contractual legitimacy are very similar. The interesting issue about deliberative democracy from a consequentialist view of valuation is whether and how the exogenous outcomes or the overall cost of collective decisions are affected by the process of deliberation. According to its proponents, this clearly misses the principal point of deliberative democracy. Contrast the essays by Przeworski and Joshua Cohen in Elster ed. (1997). While my view of democracy as justified and hence defined by reference to the idea

vantage point, however, and the relevance of his causal propositions about elections to the question of democracy's value is therefore left just as underspecified as their relevance to the issue of democracy's definition.

This leads to a second consideration that makes it important to understand Przeworski's question as 'are there any reasons aside from their intrinsic value to positively value elections?': He confines his analysis to the consequential valuation of democracy without considering how its intrinsic justification might be connected to possible consequentially generated values. An account of the systematic relationship between electoral modes of legitimization and the intrinsic justification of democracy is necessary in order to explain why, and to what extent, democrats should care about the systemic causal effects of holding elections.

This leads to the third reason for understanding Przeworski's question more narrowly and exactly than his title and pronouncements of defining democracy suggest. As an exhaustive definition of democracy, Przeworski's *minimalist conception* is an unsurprising failure: Its formal structure is far from minimal at all and hence (like all would-be exhaustive definitions) implausible as an account of a complex social kind. On the other hand, the conception's content—competitive elections—is too minimal even to capture the minimum of democracy. Appreciating the reasons why competitive elections by themselves are insufficient to constitute the democratic minimum of contemporary national states, however, can help understand the internal conceptual relationship between moral equality and democracy. Moreover, Przeworski's *minimalist defense* is a

of moral equality is compatible with the core functional implications of deliberative democracy, it does not presuppose that well-deliberated reasons are the only source of political legitimacy. On the contrary, the legitimacy of deliberational reasoning processes varies in part according to the extent that equality of power is a property of the socioeconomic background conditions of deliberation and elections as well as according to the impartiality and fairness of the overall collective decision process. Contrary to an ubiquitous utilitarian mood in contemporary politics, however, I do not believe the maximization of efficiency is part of political legitimacy or of democracy. Efficiency is a value that competes with political legitimacy as a valued property of social power systems. Impartial society-wide deliberations and fair competitive elections under a regime of highly egalitarian socioeconomic background conditions may indeed be the most *legitimate* form of political life, whether or not such a collective decision process maximizes efficiency. On the other hand, a system that falls short of this ideal in deference to efficiency concerns, such that it sustains little society-wide deliberation, may be less *democratic* in an important sense but *better, or more just, all things considered* than the deliberative ideal.

normative argument that could help us shed light on how to cogently value elections, within a general egalitarian political vision, as a method for selecting governments.

For the majority of people today, living as they do in social complexes with highly differentiated specialization of work, voting in the elections of their country's governmental leadership is the principal practice of participation in directing state power. This is, by all tolerably bright lights, a far cry from anything that could plausibly constitute a practice of 'ruling'. (Macpherson 1977; Dunn 1979; cf. Sartre 1961.) But it is nonetheless the main way in which most people participate in the determination of the decisions made by modern national states. What is it about this practice that makes it valuable?

Before finally demonstrating rather than merely mentioning Przeworski's instructive failure to provide a distinctively democratic justification of electoral legitimization, it is important to take note of the kind of intellectual task raised by this question. It is a matter of philosophical explanation, not behavioral analysis, public opinion research or deductive causal speculation. These latter modes of inquiry may provide evidence relevant to the philosophical problem, but the crux of the issue itself calls for a systematic account of the *democratic* reasons that justify the practice of voting. In conformity with the substantive denotational constraints of democracy's literal definition, the kind of reasons I have in mind are those that appeal to the repertoire of values that are internally associated with the notion of 'rule by the people'. Voting, of course, may be a highly valuable practice for reasons not specific to the ideal of democracy itself, but rather shared by a broad range of moral-political ideals. And it may be the case that there are no specifically democratic reasons that justify and thereby help explain the value of elections. If this is our objective theoretical predicament, however, the best available philosophical explanation may have to appeal to reasons so general that they could serve to justify virtually all possible modern regime types. The philosophical question of the value of electoral legitimization, therefore, has substantial and direct political implications insofar as its answer tells whether or not there is a real conceptual relationship between the legitimacy claims of ostensibly democratic modern states and the idea of democracy, as traditionally denoted. If there is no such relationship, I submit

that those whose primary political convictions flow from the value-base encapsulated by the idea of democracy have no strong reason to maintain or promote ‘the selection of political leaders by elections’. Ironically, then, we would have to conclude that the only people in the world with strong reason to support such a system are nondemocrats, and perhaps antidemocrats most of all. On a political spectrum from democracy-through nondemocracy-to antidemocracy, the latter political stance, indeed, would be the most well-satisfied by a regime in which actual decision-making has *nothing* to do with ‘rule by the people’, and whose subjects nonetheless believe that it does have *at least something* to do with ‘rule by the people’.

Why voting practices? ---Modern states are governed by elites. The political elites of modern states compete with each other through party systems. General national elections, in contradistinction to subnational and intraparty elections, are held at regular temporal intervals in order to determine which parties or sets of political elites are to hold office for the institutionally pre-determined time period. Przeworski maintains that this system of selecting governments is a self-enforcing equilibrium. The strategically-rational mechanism that makes it self-enforcing is that the losers in any given election think plausibly enough that—if they observe the election results, and refrain from acting to violently subvert the regime—they may win power the next election. The winners, for their part, refrain from trying to reform the regime into a one-party state because they think that the costs—particularly in terms of violent conflict—would be too high to make the effort worthwhile. The relevant actors in this model are politically powerful elites, those with access to the commanding heights of modern states, not the mass electorates. Przeworski therefore illustrates the self-enforcing equilibrium mechanism through the image of a coin-toss held at regular time intervals. So far as providing strategically prudent reasons to abiding by the rules of the government selection game, a coin toss practice would do just as well as electoral practices. Why, then, are elections held instead of coin tosses? Why do we vote?

According to Przeworski, voting is justified and hence valuable because it contributes to the peaceful resolution of conflict by providing information crucial to maintaining a peaceful relationship between society’s competing political forces: Voting

induces compliance, not because participation induces obligation to obey but because it provides information crucial to the maintenance of regime stability. Elections “inform everyone who would mutiny and against what.” (49). I think the crux of the argument should be displayed in full: “Voting constitutes “flexing muscles”: a reading of chances in the eventual war.... Clearly, once physical force diverges from sheer numbers, when the ability to wage war becomes professionalized and technical, voting no longer provides a reading of chances in a violent conflict. But voting does reveal information about passions, values and interests. If elections are a peaceful substitute for rebellion (Hampton 1994), it is because they inform everyone who would mutiny and against what. They inform the losers—“Here is the distribution of force: if you disobey the instructions conveyed by the results of the election, I will be more likely to beat you than you will be able to beat me in a violent confrontation”—and the winners—“If you do not hold elections again or if you grab too much, I will be able to put up a forbidding resistance.” Dictatorships do not generate this information; they need secret police to find out. In democracies, even if voting does not reveal a unique collective will, it does indicate limits to rule.” (48-49)

This argument can be grafted onto the entire range of sociological pictures of national states’ basic structural characteristics. The argument looks somewhat different depending on whether one sees it through atomistic-individualism, pluralism, elite theory, or through a class-conflict analytic perspective. These perspectives can of course be combined or synthesized in various ways. And such an approach is undoubtedly fruitful for certain problems. Since our question now is the existence and nature of the relationship between democracy and the systemic selection of rulers through competitive elections, however, it is most important to emphasize the hierarchical aspects of national states. To properly test whether a soundly operationalizable description of modern national states also captures the distinctive evaluative meaning of democracy, it is revealing to register the emphasis that the description’s hierarchic content puts on the peace-maintaining functions of elections.

Let me, therefore, draw out the sociological implications of Przeworski’s proffered justification of electoral legitimation in a language that makes explicit the

hierarchical structure of modern national states. From such a sociological vantage point, this informational function of elections is of paramount importance to political elites and their structural principals in capitalist states, i. e. firms, sectors and the capitalist class ('domestic' and 'foreign') as a whole. With such information, political elites can assess their comparative standing in the competition for power and also strategically modify their policy agenda to increase their level of popular support. Moreover, this informational function of voting makes a national state's ruling class as a whole—principals and agents alike—aware of its subjects' potential for serial or collective disobedience. From its subjects' perspective, on the other hand, the possibility of government alternation instituted through elections furnishes the state's political leadership fractions with the requisite reasons to refrain from resorting to violent modes of advancing their interests.

What are the merits of this explanation of the value of voting? Is voting valuable insofar, and just insofar, as elections are a more efficient method than random devices (such as coin-tosses) for generating the information that political elites need in order to maintain themselves in a self-enforcing strategic equilibrium and in order to gauge the limits of their regime's popular legitimacy? Let us assume that the practice of electoral legitimization through fully inclusive, free and fair elections is, in fact, an efficient method of generating this functionally useful information. I submit that if this efficiency-reason is our only sound reason for endorsing and defending electoral legitimation, then there is very little, and historically contingent, reason to prefer a Polyarchy over a competitive oligarchy, or to prefer electoral selection over a random alternation device in conjunction with a repressive and coercive method of gathering the relevant information. The notion that elections are justified and hence valuable because they are an efficient-generator-of-strategic-information is too general to explain why democrats have good reasons to promote electoral legitimization of governments. Without appeal to the foundational notion of moral equality, electoral legitimation as a feature of the minima of legitimacy, does not stand up to rational scrutiny, and democracy is robbed of its rationale. Without appeal to the derivative notion of equal freedom (derivative, that is,

from moral equality), it is at best contingently nonarbitrary to prefer elections and other liberal methods of gathering information about legitimacy. Let me demonstrate.

On Przeworski's view the justification of voting is that it induces compliance -- not because participation induces obligation to obey but because it "informs everyone who would mutiny and against what" (32). Simplifying the hierarchical structure of national states a little, take note that compliance has two class-differentiated functions in the dynamics of regime stability: In the case of the ruling class, elections serve as a mechanism for alternation of governments --elections provide the members of the ruling class with a strategic-rational reason to continue abiding by the rules of the regime. In the case of the subject class, elections serve as a mechanism for disloyalty detection— elections generate information about subjects' degree of political dissatisfaction with the regime. This is a sort of 'voice' (Hirschman 1970), which has the stabilization-generating function of providing the ruling class with a sense of their regime's popular legitimacy, and some ostensibly accurate strategic information useful for averting subversion. It is because of this function that the ruling classes of contemporary national states continue to abide by the principle of generally unlimited adult suffrage, that is the 'full inclusion' component of Polyarchy. Moreover, this function helps explain why the ruling classes opt to hold 'free and fair' elections --i.e. those procedurally fair, and held under legally guaranteed civil and political freedoms. Elections that are not 'free and fair' in this legal-institutional sense, such as those held in Soviet-type hegemonies, do not generate accurate information about the populace's level of political dissatisfaction.

The ruling classes of contemporary national states, then, have a twofold, historically contingent, positive reason to institute and maintain a regime in which rulers are selected through competitive elections. Indeed this very same reason, elections' systemic efficiency-in-the-cost-of-maintaining-order, suggests that the ruling classes also have some reason to prefer Polyarchy over less liberal-egalitarian modes of electoral legitimization.¹³

¹³ Note that this potential explanation for why Polyarchy is more valuable than a competitive hegemony is the principal consideration that could salvage Przeworski's account from the main normative-analytic critical refutation of Schumpeter's (1947) conception: that it fails to account for the rightness of universal

But does this account also provide *democratic reason* to value a system in which rulers are selected through competitive elections? The value of peace or order attaches to the institutions of government in general, to all forms of rulership. All political systems must generate the conditions of their (peaceful) reproduction. But not all do so by the mechanism of elections, and not all do so by the specific mechanism of free-and-fair elections. Why should we prefer the electoral legitimization of government over other mechanisms for maintaining the peace?

Consider an alternative possible world populated by national states in which the following conditions hold: Rather than inclusive elections of government, Coin Toss method of alternation; rather than a voting method of gathering information about who would mutiny and against what, a coercion and surveillance method of disloyalty detection. The two peace-generating functions fulfilled by fully inclusive electoral legitimization are here fulfilled by two separate institutional mechanisms, one for selecting rulers (the Coin-Toss), and one for detecting regime-endangering disloyalty—the Police State. These two mechanisms are jointly more efficient at maintaining the peace than fully inclusive electoral legitimization for the following reasons. The Coin Toss is just as constitutively efficient as elections at constructing an objective framework of strategic action in which the fractions of the ruling classes have rational expectation of alternation. Moreover, the administration of a Coin-Toss procedure is more economically efficient than the administration of elections. On the other hand, a well-managed practical complex of coercion and surveillance is a cheaper and more accurate method of detecting disloyalty than elections. The latter, by the way, is true in the alternative possible world under consideration because of advances in the quality of mechanical and social technologies for controlling and discipline human behavior.

The value of peace or order is not discriminating enough to decide between electoral legitimization and the conjunction of Coin-Toss based alternation of government with an efficient Police State! Indeed, from the perspective of optimizing the cost-efficiency of peace-maintenance, electorally legitimized states lose when

suffrage, under “conditions of liberty” (to use Gellner’s (1994) phrase). For the criticism, phrased in appropriately cutting words, see Dahl (1989).

compared with imaginable coercion-intensive alternative modes of legitimization. Why, then, does the plural-elite dictatorship sketched out in our alternative possible world seem so evidently unworthy of our moral-political allegiance? Does the value basis of democracy tell nothing against this alternative possible world? Przeworski's explanation of the value of democracy implies the ideal cannot cogently condemn this alternative possible world: If our sole criterion for valuing an electoral method of government selection is its effectiveness/success at resolving social conflicts without bloodshed, we have no reason to prefer or defend it over against an alternative dictatorial regime which is more efficient at maintaining the peace.

It may be the case, of course, that democracy creates/constitutes efficiencies in the resolution of conflict without bloodshed through mechanisms other than the one revealed by Przeworski. However, the principal philosophical point I want to make here, with the leading questions about democracy's putative inferiority to a possible totalitarian alternative, is that any such efficiency-of-peace-maintenance justification fails as an "intrinsic description" --a description of the objective moral phenomena-- why elections are worthy according to the evaluative framework of democracy.¹⁴

It may be argued that we need not maximize peace, and the peace-based 'defense' of elections only claims to establish that electoral selection achieves peace with a particular modicum of efficiency, not that it compares well with every conceivable regime from the perspective of maximizing the efficiency of order-maintenance. But then we would be left with a 'defense' of electoral legitimation that is arbitrary because it does not specify why electoral selection is preferable to other peace-generating systems. Such a 'defense' fails to explain why we should be satisfied or content with the particular modicum of efficiency in peace-maintenance achievable by electoral legitimization. The idea that a system of electoral legitimization is one-among-several of the efficient peace-maintaining regimes does little to demonstrate what the Schumpeterians owe. Far from establishing the value of elections, or demonstrating the nature of the relationship

¹⁴ See Taylor (1987: pt 1) for the idea of "intrinsic description" and its relationship to moral explanation. The notion presupposes that there is, at the least, one sound argument that establishes moral objectivity, but it does not assume the truth of either moral realism or moral anti-realism. For the record, however, Taylor

between democracy and elections, this tack is parasitic on the possibility of a sound argument which reveals the moral value-basis of democracy and that there is a systematic relationship between it and elections.

There are two ways of defending a political ideal that are salient in this connection: A *comprehensive defense* articulates the intrinsic or constitutive normative base of the ideal. A *simple defense* articulates one sufficient reason for positively valuing the ideal. The comparative merits of simple reasons depend largely on the extent and manner in which they register the ideals' constitutive normative base. A comprehensive defense of a political ideal is in this sense tied to an intrinsic or non-instrumental mode of valuation, which serves as an objective intuitional or conceptual check on the force of simple reasons.

Przeworski considers consequentialist candidates to serve as simple reasons for positively valuing democracy. All his candidates, however, are constructed within an angle of thought which eludes the problem of formulating a conceptual definition of democracy by reference to the normative base through which its comprehensive defense can be advanced. In the case of democracy, I insist, that normative base is the conviction in the basic moral equality of human beings. Przeworski's treatment of the relationship between equality and democracy is the most telling example of the sorry conceptual slippages that stem ineluctably from ignoring or putting aside the comprehensive defense of democracy and the attendant intrinsic valuation of elections. He is led to pose and speculate upon the strictly causal question Does polyarchy cause economic equality? This is an interesting and important question, of course; but it is woefully limiting as a tool for understanding the relationship of democracy and equality. It assumes, most significantly, that only elections and the systemic causal outcomes of holding elections are possibly includable among the defining features of democracy. This is a sadly cramped fashion of considering the relationship of equality and elections (not to mention the other institutional features of polyarchy). Yet Przeworski's 'defense' implicitly points in another direction, which may be taken to begin formulating other ways to think the connections between equality and elections.

(1987) argues for one (anti-naturalist) kind of moral realism, and I adhere to another (naturalist) kind, one

Let us now consider three simple reasons to value Polyarchy, all of which make reference to the core portion of democracy's intrinsic value, the idea of moral equality. 1-egalitarian structural opportunity. 2. symbolic functions. 3. educational function.

To begin, consider another consequentialist candidate (the one pointed at -- though, alas, not explored-- in Przeworski's argument). Polyarchy provides the structural opportunity to peacefully gain concessions from the ruling classes.¹⁵ The actual outcomes generated through such opportunity will of course vary with, among other things, the extent of non-class cleavage in a national state, the specific institutional design of the polyarchy, and the party system that operates it. But this *people's viewpoint structural opportunity* could be thought of as a sufficient simple reason for preferring a polyarchical electoral method for selecting governments. It is crucial to the content of this justificatory reason, however, that its structure is *equalibertarian*. In principle every citizen has the opportunity to peacefully affect policy-making through the exercise of civil and political rights. To be effective, of course, disadvantaged individuals organize themselves into groups of similarly disadvantaged individuals. But subordinated groups' structural opportunity to gain concessions has a normative significance of justificatory force because of the effects such opportunity has on individuals' life chances. It amounts to what is in effect a constitutional chance --absent in all varieties of Hegemony, including electoralist sorts-- of having legitimate political voice.

The most thorough comparative-historical research on the origins and development of polyarchy in capitalist national states indicates that the political strength and action of the wage-earning classes has been decisive in establishing fully inclusive and liberal electoral regimes (Therborn 1977; Rueschmeyer, Stephens & Stephens 1989). There is substantial evidence, in addition, that this has also been so in the breakdown of fully inclusive noncapitalist hegemonies or one-party socialist states. (Kubik 1998). Moreover, the structural opportunity to gain concessions from the ruling class benefits not only the industrial working-class and the wage-earning peasantry, but

already well-developed by Boyd (1988).

¹⁵ This view is well-expressed by Fisk (1991) in an essay which, like Przeworski's, displays considerable recognition of the conflict-ridden nature of modern politics.

also other groups subordinated historically in domination-laden relationships. In the limit case, legitimation-by-free-and-fully-inclusive-elections symbolically performs the message that the ruling class is a sort of popularly accountable trustee of the entire electorate, and that its continuance in power depends on its willingness to provide concessions and not capture too many rents.

Indeed, a ruling class proper is not conceivable as part of a democratic system. That is an important reason why so many democratic liberals and leftists are bothered by, and insist on denying, the cogency of Marxist categories for understanding capitalism. (If capitalism systemically institutes a ruling class, and our national states primary institutional function is to operate the structural imperatives of capitalist production and exchange, then our world is arguably not even composed of polyarchies --our world is not even minimally democratic.) A sociopolitical system is lacking in democratic organization to the extent that it systemically reproduces a ruling class. The overall coolness, sharpness and rigour of Przeworski's class analyses of capitalism (1985, 1986) were always matched by the occasional expression of outrage about channels of capitalist class oppression. The traditional idea of democracy as rule by the people, as expanded by modernity's Left to apply 'integrally' to all of society, is a most important source of rational outrage about capitalist oppression. This was still inspiringly expressed by Przeworski (1986). But Przeworski (1999) is a plea to deflate and discontinue the democracy-based critique of capitalism. This plea is couched through traditionally conservative values, order and efficiency, and (implicitly) also through the value of scientific usefulness or 'operationalizability', and it proceeds as if these values could adjudicate definitional disputes over the nature of democracy.

Since Przeworski appeals to conservative thinking for clues, let me do the same to get a more illuminating clue. A familiar criticism of the idea of democracy is that rule-by-the-people is really no-rule at all. On this view, 'the people' and 'the masses' are so 'lawless' and 'disorderly' that to think that a system of-rule-by-the-people is possible is to think nonsense. Since ruling is an important good, democracy is therefore bad because it means no-rule. I think there is something to this criticism; not that it is a sound criticism of democracy. It is not a sound argument at all; but the connection it makes

between rule-by-the-people and no-rule is telling about how we may properly understand and value democracy in the complex social entities of the modern world.¹⁶

Agonistic and contestatory ideals suggest that human beings have a value-based interest in non-domination. But why should everyone's interest in non-domination be sufficed? Why, that is, may government not systemically enable a particular class of human beings to enjoy the benefit of non-domination, without care to whether or not other classes of human beings are dominated? Because everyone is equal, and that entails that everyone's basic interests deserve consistent treatment. This is the core presumptive tenet of the modern political imaginary.

The very randomness, rather than the predictability or rationality, of 'free and fair' elections is what makes it valuable that elections be free and fair rather than not, from the standpoint that modern democracy's core intuition that no-one is naturally entitled to rule. From this standpoint, for example, the objection to *laissez-faire* private campaign financing of elections in contemporary capitalist states is precisely that the system's built-in predictably narrow structural parameters on the maneuvering room for national state policy-making are systemically cramped even further by the incentive effects of treating the rich and the poor as if they actually had equal opportunity to finance candidates and parties under a 'libertarian' rule that takes for granted the status quo distribution of resources. No ruling class is conceptually possible within the democratic political vision; and its expectation of no-rule is realized to the extent that freedom and fairness obtain in the totality of social life.

The structural opportunity of concessions, not peace itself alone, is what makes subordinated groups value full inclusion. (Fisk 1991). Subordinated groups perceive structural opportunity for gaining concessions; but even if this is largely a misperception, or a drastic overestimation of the rule-set possibilities, there are other equality-based justifications for fully inclusive electoral legitimation.

¹⁶ This is registered in much contemporary political theory with a variety of nuance and accent. See Young (1990) on the politics of difference; Fisk (1991) on non-subordination. Pettit (1996, 1999) on "anti-power" and "contestatory democratisation"; Mangabeira Unger (1987, 1996) and Shapiro (1989, 1994) on anti-hierarchy; and Connolly (1991) (on anti-exclusion and agonism). But why should we care about no-ruling-class? That there be no-ruling-class is the *sine qua non* of democracy (cf. Sartori (1987) on democracy as the opposite of autocracy; Held (1996) on autonomy --subjection to another's rule-- as the opposite of democracy). This explains the appeal of Polyarchy by reference to what it is not: It is not Hegemony.

A political regime can be judged according to whether its modes of operation inculcate correct moral beliefs and perform a public aesthetic that is morally palatable. These two functions are probably connected and complementary (e.g. the public aesthetic is probably one of the mechanisms that inculcates moral beliefs). Their value, it should be noted, is independent of whether or not beliefs and the public imaginary have a causal influence on behavior and action. What is often called “mere culture” is never an irrelevancy; at least this is so within political philosophies that take seriously the tasks of justifying and defending political ideals. From an individualist-egalitarian ethical standpoint, a system is valuable if it officializes the public commitment to equality --thus practicing a morally palatable public aesthetic-- and if it has the systemic outcome of generating and maintaining belief in the moral equality of all human beings.

The *ritual* of full inclusion in the voting process has the performative effect of *expressing the idea of equality as a public commitment..* After all, voting is the proximate cause in the chain of events that constitutes the regularly re-executed selection of public servants through fully inclusive elections. That everyone is entitled to vote *says*, as a matter of official belief, that no-one is naturally entitled to rule, and that this is so *because* everyone is a self-ruler. The idea that everyone is a self-ruler presupposes the idea of equality, and thus the way its aesthetic effectivity is practically ritualized in the regular holding of fully inclusive elections *symbolically recognizes and expresses* the rightness of equality.

Moreover, there are strong reasons of a general theoretical kind to believe that the practice of regularly holding fully inclusive elections has an effect on the distribution of egalitarian beliefs. (Barry 1978). The inductive evidence, to be sure, is perhaps mixed on the question of whether liberal, democratic, and constitutional institutions play a significant causal role in the generation and maintenance of egalitarian belief systems. Indeed, the state of the art in the fields of inquiry relevant to this question is so far from delivering conclusive evidence that we cannot seriously rule out the possibility that we may not ever be able to make detailed or exact causal generalizations about the role of ideas in history. However, this very inaccuracy --perhaps transcendently necessary inaccuracy-- in determining to what extent ideas do matter causally in the history of human behavior, establishes a strong substantive reason of prudence to take measures

and support institutions that serve to propagate the right beliefs among the population. And to believe that some people are fundamentally better than other people is impossible—and therefore wrong—within the assumptionall framework of modern ethical thought and democratic politics.

To summarize the upshot of our train of thought: Elections are valuable because they simulate rule-by-the-people—this ritual practice is embedded within a societal complex whose legal infrastructure in premised upon and promises individuated human equality. From a democratic standpoint, the value of electoral legitimation stems from its performative/symbolic functions in maintaining disbelief in natural inequality of entitlement to rule. This is some distance from the positive maximization of ‘rule by the people’. But ‘rule by the people’ logically entails no-rule-by-less-than-the-people. And fully inclusive electoral legitimation not only serves to publicly express this moral-egalitarian bottom-line of democracy—under some empirical-institutional circumstances, it may also function as a concession-generator for subordinated groups within a political system. Equality-premised electoral legitimation of political systems thus constitutes one very important element of polyarchy, i.e.of the minimum institutional requistes of the democratic idea. But equality-premised electoral legitimation is only one of the three central elements of polyarchy. To reduce democracy to electoral legitimation is doubly fallacious: It is a fallacy to reduce democracy to polyarchy and it is a fallacy to reduce polyarchy to electoral legitimation.

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