# Models of Democracy

Third Edition

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polity

# 1 Classical Democracy: Athens

In the fifth century BC, Athens emerged as the most innovative and sophisticated 'city-state' or *polis* among many rival Greek communities.[1] The reasons for its development and for the establishment of its extraordinary 'democratic' way of life are not of prime concern here, although a few comments are in order.

From 800 to 500 BC, urban patterns of civilization slowly crystallized in the Greek world; many small, often tightly knit communities hugged the coastline, while few could be found very far inland (see Finley, 1963, 1973a; P. Anderson, 1974a, pp. 29–44). Initially, these cities were typically controlled by local kingships but later, often after violent conflicts, they came to be dominated by 'clan' and 'tribal' hierarchies. One commentator describes these cities as essentially 'residential nodes of concentration for farmers and landowners: in the typical small town of this epoch, the cultivators lived within the walls of the city and went out to work in the fields every day, returning at night – although the territory of the cities always included an agrarian circumference with a wholly rural population settled in it' (P. Anderson, 1974a, pp. 29–30). The growth of land and overseas trade stimulated the development of particularly well-placed coastal cities, some of which came to enjoy periods of sustained growth.

The political continuity of the early city-states was broken by the rise of the 'tyrants' or autocrats (*c*.650–510 BC), who represented the interests of those who had recently become wealthy through either landownership or commerce and trade. The clan and tribal order gave way to more tyrannous regimes. But the stability of these regimes was vulnerable to shifting alliances and coalitions. The growth of wealth for some was not matched by improvements in the conditions of the poorer classes, particularly those who were landless or owned small farms and peasant holdings. An expansion in the population increased pressure on the privileged, and a period of intensive social struggle ensued. In the complex and intensive politics of the cities, concessions often had to be made to preserve a balance of power; and the concessions that were made, notably in Athens but also elsewhere, strengthened the economic autonomy of small and medium-sized farmers as well as of some categories of peasants, creating a community of smallholders (see Hornblower, 1992, pp. 3–4). The status of these groups was elevated further by important changes in military organization which made moderately prosperous farmers and peasants, among others, central to the

[1] For the Greek term *polis* I shall use the term 'city-state' and, occasionally, 'city-republic'. The issues which underpin some scholars' preference for 'city-republic' – issues concerning when the idea of 'the state' was first formulated – will be addressed in the following two chapters.

community's defence (see Mann, 1986, pp. 197–204). It was this change, perhaps more than any other, that affected the future political structure of city-states.

A growing number of independent citizens enjoyed a substantial increase in the scope of their activities with the expansion of slavery (a point returned to at greater length below). It was the formation of a slave economy – in mining, agriculture and certain craft industries – which, as has been remarked, 'permitted the sudden florescence of Greek urban civilization ... the free citizen now stood out in full relief, against the background of slave labourers' (P. Anderson, 1974a, pp. 36–7; cf. Dickenson, 1997, ch. 2). Greek city communities acquired a growing sense of identity and solidarity. Clear lines of demarcation were drawn between 'insiders' (citizens) and 'outsiders' (slaves and other categories of people including all those, however respectable, who had come from other communities and resettled). This identity was reinforced by a growth in literacy which also aided the administration and control of people and resources (although the ancient world remained predominantly an oral culture).

Innovations in the 'constitutions' of city-states followed, transforming the written and unwritten legal codes which had been passed down through the generations (see Finley, 1975). It appears that during the mid-sixth century the first 'democratic' polity emerged in Chios, though others, all with their own particularities and idiosyncrasies, soon formed. While Athens stands out as the pinnacle of this development, the new political culture became fairly widespread throughout Greek civilization, enfranchising the whole of the free citizenry (cf. Hornblower, 1992, pp. 1–2). It is worth stressing that the emergence of these early democracies did not result from a single set of events; rather, their development was marked by a process of continuous change over many generations. But the question remains: why was it that the developments referred to above led to the creation of a type of democracy?

This is a difficult question, the answer to which is by no means fully clear. Of all the factors that could be stressed, it was the conjunction perhaps of the emergence of an economically and militarily independent citizenry in the context of relatively small and compact communities that nurtured a democratic way of life (cf. Finley, 1983; Mann, 1986, ch. 7; Dunn, 1992, chs 1–3). Political changes took place within geographically and socially demarcated communities of a few thousand people living closely together either within one urban centre or within the surrounding countryside.[2] In these communities, communication was relatively easy, news travelled quickly and the impact of particular social and economic arrangements was fairly immediate. Questions of political culpability and responsibility were almost unavoidable, and the kinds of obstacle to political participation posed by large, complex societies were not yet significant. These factors – size, complexity and degree of political heterogeneity – are of great importance in democratic theory, although, I shall argue, the eventual demise of classical Greek democracy does not mean the end of all historical opportunities for extensive participation in public affairs. But having said this, it is as well to bear in mind that even in Athens the

[2] In fifth-century Athens, for a significant period the largest of the city-states, there were estimated to have been between 30,000 and 45,000 citizens.

composition of the *demos* consisted entirely of free adult males of strictly Athenian descent.[3]

## Political ideals and aims

The development of democracy in Athens has been a central source of inspiration for modern political thought (cf. Finley, 1983; Bernal, 1987). Its political ideals – equality among citizens, liberty, respect for the law and justice – have influenced political thinking in the West, although there are some central ideas, for instance, the modern liberal notion that human beings are 'individuals' with 'rights', that cannot be directly traced to Athens. The legacy of Athens was, however, by no means accepted uncritically by the great Greek thinkers who examined its ideas and culture, including Thucydides (*c.*460–399 BC), Plato (*c.*427–347 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC) (see Jones, 1957; Farrar, 1992). Their works contain some of the most challenging and durable assessments of the limitations of democratic theory and practice that have been written. It is a remarkable fact that there is no major ancient Greek democratic theorist whose writings and ideas we can turn to for the details and justification of the classical democratic *polis*. Our record of this flourishing culture must be pieced together from sources as diverse as fragments of writing, the work of the critical 'opposition' and the findings of historians and archaeologists.

The ideals and aims of Athenian democracy are strikingly recounted in the famous funeral speech attributed to Pericles, a prominent Athenian citizen, general and politician. The speech, written down and probably recomposed by Thucydides some thirty years after its delivery, extols the political strengths and importance of Athens (see Finley, 1972). There are two passages in particular that deserve to be highlighted:

> Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next door neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.
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> We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.

[3] Citizenship was on rare occasions granted to others but only with the approval of the Assembly, the key 'sovereign' body.

> ... Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated. (Pericles' Funeral Oration, in Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, pp. 145, 147)

There are several important points that can be drawn from these lines. Pericles describes a community in which all citizens could and indeed should participate in the creation and nurturing of a common life. Formally, citizens faced no obstacles to involvement in public affairs based on rank or wealth. The *demos* held sovereign power, that is, supreme authority, to engage in legislative and judicial functions. The Athenian concept of 'citizenship' entailed taking a share in these functions, participating *directly* in the affairs of the state. As Pericles says: 'We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all.'

Athenian democracy was marked by a general commitment to the principle of *civic virtue*: dedication to the republican city-state and the subordination of private life to public affairs and the common good. 'The public' and 'the private' were intertwined, although, as Pericles points out, tolerance is essential in order that people can enjoy themselves 'in their own way'. None the less, Athenian democrats tended to the view that 'the virtue of the individual is the same as the virtue of the citizen' (see Lee, 1974, p. 32). Individuals could only properly fulfil themselves and live honourably as citizens in and through the *polis*; for ethics and politics were merged in the life of the political community. In this community the citizen had rights and obligations; but these rights were not attributes of private individuals and these obligations were not enforced by a state dedicated to the maintenance of a framework to protect the private ends of individuals (see Sabine, 1963, pp. 16–17). Rather, a citizen's rights and obligations were connected to *his* station; they followed from *his* existence *qua* citizen: they were 'public' rights and duties. In contrast to later liberal positions, politics in this conception demanded a great deal of people, yet this was not seen as a violation but as an affirmation of their capacity for autonomy. Political order was presented as a vehicle for expressing and realizing their nature (Farrar, 1992, p. 37). A fulfilled and good life was only possible in the *polis*.

The peculiarly modern distinctions which began to emerge with Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) between state and society, specialized officials and citizens, 'the people' and government, are not part of the political 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. The principle of government was the principle of a form of life: *direct participation*. And the process of government itself was based

on what Pericles refers to as 'proper discussions', i.e. free and unrestricted discourse, guaranteed by *isegoria*, an equal right to speak in the sovereign assembly (Finley, 1973b, pp. 18–19). Accordingly, the ancient democratic *polis* can be thought of as an attempt to enable men of different backgrounds and attributes 'to express and transform their understanding of the good through political interaction' (Farrar, 1992, p.38). Decisions and laws rested, it was claimed, on conviction – the force of the better argument – and not mere custom, habit or brute force. (The importance of public deliberation was not emphasized again in political theory for a long time: see chs 2, 3 and 9.) The law of the state was the citizens' law. Before the law everyone was equal and, hence, as Pericles puts it, 'we keep the law'. Law is juxtaposed with tyranny, and freedom, therefore, implies respect for the law. As one commentator aptly put it: 'The Athenian did not imagine himself to be wholly unconstrained, but he drew the sharpest distinction between the restraint which is merely subjection to another man's arbitrary will and that which recognizes in the law a rule which has a right to be respected and hence is in this sense self-imposed' (Sabine, 1963, p. 18). If the law is properly created within the framework of the common life, it legitimately commands obedience. In this sense, the notions of the rule of law, due process and constitutional procedure find their earliest expression in the politics of the Athenian city-state.

It seems that Athenians on the whole prided themselves on a 'free and open' political life in which citizens could develop and realize their capacities and skills. It was clearly recognized that not everybody had the ability, for instance, to command and lead the army or navy: differences in ability and merit were acknowledged. But when Pericles proudly proclaimed that 'our city is an education to Greece', he was speaking, above all, of a form of life in which 'each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility' (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, pp. 147–8). Through independence, status, education, art, religion and, above all, participation in the common life of the city, the individual could fulfil his 'material powers' and the *telos* (goal or objective) of the common good. And the securing and realization of the citizen's proper role and place in the city-state was precisely what was meant by justice.

One of the most remarkable descriptions of ancient democracy can be found in Aristotle's *The Politics* (written between 335 and 323 BC), a book which, while examining 'lawful' and durable forms of rule, provided a detailed account of democracy, albeit as a model of rule which Aristotle himself could not approve of (indeed, he referred to it as a 'transgression' of good government). The account analyses 'the claims, ethical standards and aims' of democracy and clearly refers to the key features of a number of Greek democracies. The second paragraph contains probably the finest and most succinct statement of classical democratic institutions. The account is worth quoting at length:

> A basic principle of the democratic constitution is liberty. People constantly make this statement, implying that only in this constitution do men share in liberty; for every democracy, they say, has liberty for its aim. 'Ruling and being ruled in turn' is one element in liberty, and the democratic idea of justice is in

> fact numerical equality, not equality based on merit;[4] and when this idea of what is just prevails, the multitude must be sovereign, and whatever the majority decides is final and constitutes justice. For, they say, there must be equality for each of the citizens. The result is that in democracies the poor have more sovereign power than the rich; for they are more numerous, and the decisions of the majority are sovereign. So this is one mark of liberty, one which all democrats make a definitive principle of their constitution. Another is to live as you like. For this, they say, is a function of being free, since its opposite, living not as you like, is the function of one enslaved. This is the second defining principle of democracy, and from it has come the idea of 'not being ruled', not by anyone at all if possible, or at least only in alternation. This ['to be ruled by alternation'] is a contribution towards that liberty which is based on equality.
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> From these fundamentals, and from rule thus conceived, are derived the following features of democracy: (a) Elections to office by all from among all. (b) Rule of all over each and of each by turns over all. (c) Offices filled by lot, either all or at any rate those not calling for experience or skill. (d) No tenure of office dependent on the possession of a property qualification, or only on the lowest possible. (e) The same man not to hold the same office twice, or only rarely, or only a few apart from those connected with warfare. (f) Short terms for all offices or for as many as possible. (g) All to sit on juries, chosen from all and adjudicating on all or most matters, i.e. the most important and supreme, such as those affecting the constitution, scrutinies, and contracts between individuals. (h) The assembly as the sovereign authority in everything, or at least the most important matters, officials having no sovereign power over any, or over as few as possible.... Next, (i) payments for services, in the assembly, in the law-courts, and in the offices, is regular for all (or at any rate the offices, the law-courts, council, and the sovereign meetings of the assembly, or in the offices where it is obligatory to have meals together). Again (j), as birth, wealth, and education are the defining marks of oligarchy, so their opposites, low birth, low incomes, and mechanical occupations, are regarded as typical of democracy. (k) No official has perpetual tenure, and if any such office remains in being after an early change, it is shorn of its power and its holders selected by lot from among picked candidates.
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> These are the common characteristics of democracies. (Aristotle, *The Politics*, pp. 362–4)

For the democrat, liberty and equality are, according to Aristotle, inextricably linked. There are two criteria of liberty: (1) 'ruling and being ruled in turn', and (2) 'living as one chooses'. In order to establish the first criterion as an effective principle of government, equality is essential: without 'numerical equality', 'the multitude' cannot be sovereign. 'Numerical equality', i.e. an equal share of the practice of ruling, is said by classical democrats to be possible because (1) participation is financially remunerated so that citizens are not worse off as a result of political involvement, (2) citizens have equal voting power, and (3)

[4] Pericles' conception of the democratic principle of equality indicates a place for an explicit recognition of merit. Aristotle's account, in contrast, stresses that the democratic idea of equality is equality of condition and outcome. Aristotle's discussion of these two kinds of equality in *The Politics* is among the earliest statements of this important distinction. (See Aristotle, *The Politics*, pp. 195–8.)

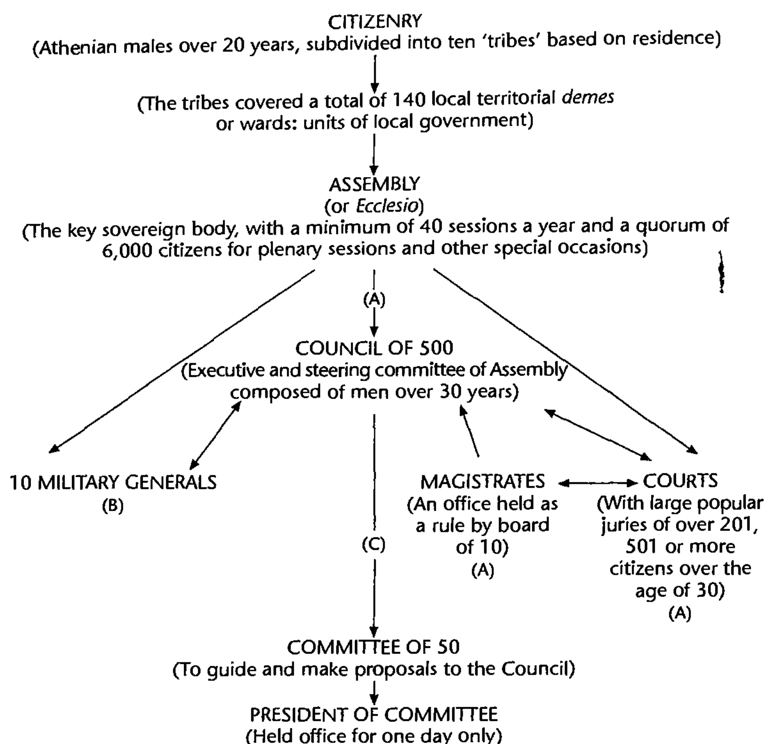
there are in principle equal chances to hold office. Thus understood, equality is the practical basis of liberty. It is also the moral basis of liberty; for the belief that people should have an equal share of ruling justifies the first criterion of liberty ('ruling and being ruled in turn'). While this strong commitment to equality might conflict (as many, including Aristotle, have argued) with liberty as measured by the second criterion ('living as one chooses'), democrats hold that there must be some limits to choice if one citizen's freedom is not to interfere unjustly with another's. So long as each citizen has the opportunity of 'ruling *and* being ruled in turn', the risks associated with equality can be minimized and, therefore, both criteria of liberty can be met. On Aristotle's account, then, classical democracy entails liberty and liberty entails strict political equality – a matter which caused him to express grave reservations about democracy, despite his general affirmation of the nation, which was to be highly influential in the development of Renaissance political thought, that human beings are political animals who can only find fulfilment within the *polis* (see ch. 2 below).

## Institutional features

The institutions described in Aristotle's second paragraph further clarify the truly radical nature of ancient democracy. It is hardly surprising that Marx and Engels took it as a source of inspiration; their own model of a properly democratic order, the Paris Commune of 1871, is outlined by them in a way that suggests a remarkable number of common features with Athens. Figure 1.1 sets out the basic Athenian institutional structure.[5]

The citizenry as a whole formed the key sovereign body of Athens: the Assembly. The Assembly met over forty times a year and had a quorum of 6,000 citizens (the minimum number of people whose presence was required for the proper or valid transaction of business). All major issues such as the legal framework for the maintenance of public order, finance and direct taxation, ostracism and foreign affairs (including assessing the performance of the military and navy, forming alliances, the declaration of war, the concluding of peace) came before the assembled citizens for deliberation and decision. The Assembly decided the political commitments of the Athenian state. While unanimity (*homonoia*) was always sought in the belief that problems could only be resolved correctly in the common interest, the possibility of major differences of opinion and clashes of individual interest was clearly recognized. The Assembly allowed intractable issues to go to a formal vote with majority rule (Larsen, 1948). Voting was both a way of making explicit differences of judgement and a procedural mechanism to legitimate a solution to pressing matters. The Greeks probably invented the use of formal voting procedures to legitimate decisions in the face of conflicting positions. But the ideal remained consensus, and it is not clear that even a majority of issues was put to the vote (see Mansbridge, 1983, pp. 13–15).

[5] The basic structure of Athenian democracy developed in the context of, and existed side by side with, a number of regulatory institutions (for instance, the Areopagus, a Council of Elders) which predated it and continued to have some influence even after the end of democracy in Athens in the late 320s (see Hornblower, 1992).




*Methods of election or selection*

(A) The ten tribes each sent fifty councillors to the Council, drawn from the *demes*. *Demes* elected candidates in rough proportion to their size to 'represent' them in Council and in other offices. The initial choice of candidates was determined by lot. Those 'elected' were put forward into a 'pool' of candidates. Finally, the candidates who would actually serve were selected from the pool, again by lot. This method was said to equalize everybody's chance of holding office. The terms of office were short (one year) with typically no provision for immediate re-election. All elected officials were paid for their services, as was attendance in the Assembly at certain times.

(B) These were chosen by the citizenry by direct election and eligible for repeated re-election.

(C) The Committee was made up by rotation from the Council and served for one-tenth of the yearly term of office.

**Figure 1.1** Classical democracy: Athens. (Based on the constitution of Kleisthenes, reforms of which were adopted in 507 BC and later amended in the 460s and 403 to include payment for public office and payment for attendance in the Assembly.)
*Sources*: Finley (1963, 1983); Sabine (1963); P. Anderson (1974a); Hornblower (1992).

The Assembly was too large a body to prepare its own agenda, to draft legislation and to be a focal point for the reception of new political initiatives and proposals. A Council of 500 took responsibility for organizing and proposing public decisions; it was aided, in turn, by a more streamlined Committee of 50

(which served for one month) with a president at its head (who could only hold office for one day). While courts were organized on a similar basis to the Assembly, the executive functions of the city were carried out by 'magistrates', although their own power was diffused by ensuring that even these posts were held by a board of ten. Nearly all such 'officials' were elected for a period of one year (with service typically restricted to two occasions in a lifetime). Further, in order to avoid the dangers of autocratic politics or clientage associated with direct elections, a variety of methods of election was deployed to preserve the accountability of political administrators and the state system more generally, including the rotation of tasks, sortition or lot and direct election.

## The exclusivity of ancient democracy

The extraordinary innovations of Athenian democracy rested in large part on its exclusivity. The classical *polis* was marked by unity, solidarity, participation, public deliberation and a highly restricted citizenship. The state reached deeply into the lives of its citizens, but embraced only a small proportion of the population. Citizens were engaged together not only in activities such as administration, military service, lawmaking, jury service, religious ceremonies, games and festivals, but also in the surveillance and control of large numbers of people who could play no part at all in the state. In the first instance, Athenian political culture was an adult male culture. Only Athenian men over the age of 20 were eligible for active citizenship. Ancient democracy was a democracy of the patriarchs; women had no political rights and their civic rights were strictly limited (although married women fared rather better in this latter respect than single women). The achievements of classical democracy were directly linked to the politically unrecognized work and domestic service of women (and children).[6]

There were large numbers of residents in Athens who were also ineligible to participate in the formal proceedings. These included 'immigrants' whose families had settled in Athens several generations earlier. But perhaps by far the biggest category of politically marginalized people was the slave population. It is estimated that the proportion of slaves to free citizens in Periclean Athens was at least 3:2, a slave population of some 80,000–100,000 (Andrewes, 1967; P. Anderson, 1974a). Slaves were utilized in nearly all forms of agriculture, industry and mining, as well as in domestic settings. Athenian slavery and democracy seem to have been indivisible. The hiatus between the formal and actual basis of Athenian political life is striking. Classical conceptions of political equality were far removed from ideas about 'equal power' for all adults; political equality was a form of equality for those with equal status (male and Athenian born), and even then, as we shall shortly note, equal status did not really mean the opportunity for equal political influence. The legendary democracy was intimately connected to what one might call the 'tyranny of citizens'.

Thus, whether we can legitimately refer to Athens as a democracy at all is a question that at least has to be posed. Unquestionably, the politics of ancient

[6] Athenian native freewomen were regarded as 'citizens' only for genealogical purposes; they could not participate in politics. Their citizenship was instrumental for the purpose of producing citizen sons (see Dickenson, 1997, ch. 2).

Athens rested on a highly undemocratic base. But it is worth stressing, as Finley has done, that the choice between 'rule by the few' or 'rule by the many' was 'a meaningful choice', and that the 'rights' that various groups claimed for themselves, and bitterly fought for, were of the greatest significance, even though '"the many" were a minority of the population' (Finley, 1983, p.9). Both the remarkable achievements and the strict limits of Athenian democracy need to be appreciated.

If one puts aside for a moment the issues concerning the restricted membership of the city-republic and the tensions and conflicts it would have inevitably generated, and focuses instead on some of the internal features of the new democratic order, then it is possible to glimpse significant difficulties created by the innovative form of Athenian politics: difficulties which, arguably, contributed to its incapacity to endure beyond the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Recorded history gives us very little access to the actual experiences and practices of ancient democracy. But one of the most intriguing accounts we have of its most compelling and negative qualities can be found in the writings of Xenophon (in Rodewald, 1974). In the following excerpt he illustrates many of the institutional features elaborated earlier by describing (or *re*-creating) a series of incidents and debates that took place in about 406 BC. The illustration highlights both the striking political accountability established in Athens – the direct involvement of citizens in the actual process of public decision-making – and some of the sources of its difficulties. The extract refers to a notable Athenian naval victory which, however, left many of the victor's sailors dead. Those in charge of the expedition were accused of unnecessarily leaving men in wrecked boats to drown. As with many of the other accounts we have, it should be remembered that this story was written by someone who was far from sympathetic to democratic ideas. None the less, it does seem a vivid illustration of political life as it was then and, hence, is worth reproducing:

> Back home, the People removed from office all the Generals except Konon. Two of the Generals who had taken part in the battle, Protomachos and Aristogenes, did not return to Athens. When the other six – Perikles [son of the famous Pericles], Diomedon, Lysias, Aristokrates, Thrasyllos and Erasinides – arrived, Archedemos, who was at that time a leading popular politician and controller of the War-Relief Fund, proposed the imposition of a fine on Erasinides and brought him before a Court of Justice ... The Court decided that Erasinides should be remanded in custody. After this the Generals made statements at a meeting of the Council about the battle and the violence of the storm. Timokrates then proposed that these Generals too should be taken into custody and brought before the Assembly, and the Council had them taken into custody.
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> Afterwards there was a meeting of the Assembly, at which a number of people, and in particular Theramenes, attacked the Generals, saying that they should be called on to explain why they had not rescued the men who had been shipwrecked... Each of the Generals then spoke in his own defence – briefly, for they were not offered the opportunity to deliver a speech as the law required. They explained what had happened: they themselves were to sail in pursuit of the enemy, and they had given the job of rescuing the shipwrecked to some of the ship-captains, who were capable men and had served as Generals in the past

. . . If anyone must be blamed, there was no-one whom they could blame for the failure of the rescue operations other than those to whom the job had been given. 'And we shall not', they added, 'make the false assertion that they are to blame, just because they are now making charges against us. We maintain that it was the violence of the storm that made the rescue impossible.' For this they offered as witnesses the helmsmen and many others who had sailed with them. With such arguments they were on the point of convincing the Assembly; many citizens were standing up and offering to go bail for them. However, it was decided that the matter should be adjourned to another meeting of the Assembly, for by then it was late and it would have been impossible to count votes, and that the Council should draft a motion as to what sort of trial the men should have.

After this came the Apaturia festival, at which fathers and their families meet together. Thus Theramenes and his supporters were able to arrange for men dressed in black and with their hair close-shaven, of whom there were large numbers at the festival, to attend the Assembly, as if they were kinsmen of those who had perished; and they induced Kallixenos to attack the Generals in the Council. Then came the meeting of the Assembly, at which the Council presented its motion, which was moved by Kallixenos. It was in the following terms: 'Resolved, that, since speeches in accusation of the Generals and speeches of the Generals in their own defence have been heard at the previous Assembly, all the Athenians do now is proceed to hold a ballot by constituencies; that for each constituency there be two urns; that in each constituency a herald proclaim that whoever thinks the Generals did wrong in failing to rescue those who won the victory in the naval battle shall cast his vote in the first urn and whoever does not think so shall cast his vote in the second urn; and that, if it be decided that they did wrong, they be punished with death and handed over to the Eleven[7] and their property be confiscated. . .'

Then a man came forward and said that he had been saved by clinging to a flour barrel and that those who were drowning told him, if he were saved, to report to the People that the Generals had failed to rescue those who had fought most gallantly for their fatherland.

Next a summons was served on Kallixenos for having made an illegal proposal; Euryptolemos son of Peisianax and a few others were the sponsors of it. Some of the People showed their approval of this, but the great mass shouted out that it was monstrous if the People were not allowed to do whatever they wished. Lykiskos took up this theme and proposed that, unless the summons be withdrawn, those who had served it should be judged by the same vote as the Generals; and as the mob broke out again in shouts of approval, they were forced to withdraw the summons.

Then some members of the Presiding Committee declared that they would not put the motion to the vote, since it was illegal. At this Kallixenos again mounted the platform and made the same complaint against them as had been made against Euryptolemos, and the crowd shouted that if they refused to put the motion to the vote they should be prosecuted. This terrified the members of the Committee, and all of them agreed to put the motion, except Socrates the son of Sophroniskos; Socrates said that he would do nothing at all that was contrary to law.

[7] The translator of this passage explains the Eleven as 'a board of officials, chosen annually by lot, who were, inter alia, in charge of the prison and of executions' (Rodewald, 1974, p. 128).

Euryptolemos then rose and spoke as follows in defence of the Generals:

'I have come to the platform, men of Athens, partly to accuse Perikles, although he is my kinsman and dear to me, and Diomedon, although he is a friend of mine, partly to speak in their defence, partly to recommend the measures that seem to be in the best interests of the community at large... The course of action that I recommend is one that will make it impossible for you to be misled, either by me or by anyone else, and will enable you to act with full knowledge, in punishing those who have acted wrongly, and to inflict on them, collectively and individually, whatever punishment you please. What I propose is that you should allow them at least one day, if not more, to speak in their own defence, so that you will be relying on your own judgement rather than that of others... Give these men a legal trial, men of Athens... a separate trial for each of them. If this procedure is followed, those who have done wrong will suffer the extreme penalty and those who are blameless will be set free, men of Athens, by your decision; men who have done no wrong will not be put to death. You will be observing the dictates of piety and the terms of your oath in giving them a legal trial... What are you afraid of, that makes you want to act in such excessive haste?...'

After making this speech, he put forward a motion that the men should be tried in accordance with the decree of Kannonos, each of them separately: the Council's motion was that judgement should be passed on all of them together by a single vote. When there was a show of hands to decide between the two motions, they decided at first in favour of Euryptolemos' proposal, but when Menekles put in an objection under oath (alleging illegality), there was a fresh vote, and this time the Council's proposal was approved. They then voted on the eight Generals who had taken part in the battle. The vote went against them, and the six who were in Athens were put to death.

Not long afterwards the Athenians repented and voted that preliminary plaints be lodged against those who had deceived the People, that they furnish sureties until they come up for trial, and that Kallixenos be included among them. Plaints were lodged against four others also and they were taken into custody by their sureties, but later, during a civil disturbance, they escaped, before being brought to trial. Kallixenos [later] returned ... to the city, but everyone loathed him, and he died of starvation. (Xenophon, *History of Greece* 1.7, in Rodewald, 1974, pp. 2–6)

Xenophon's story highlights the accountability of officials and citizens to the Assembly, popular control of commanding officers, extensive open debate, and decisions by mass meetings, as well as a variety of other features of the Athenian city-state. It illustrates also how this rich texture of participation was shaped by the dependence of full participation on skills in oratory; clashes between rival groups of leaders; informal networks of communication and intrigue; the emergence of strongly opposed factions which were prepared to push for quick and decisive measures; the vulnerability of the Assembly to the excitement of the moment; the unstable basis of certain popular decisions; and the potential for political instability of a very general kind due to the absence of some system of checks on impulsive behaviour (see Rodewald's helpful remarks, 1974, pp. 1–2, 19). A number of constitutional checks were built into the structure of Athenian democracy at a later date to safeguard it precisely against hasty irreversible decisions. These changes tried to balance popular sovereignty with a

constitutional framework capable of protecting enacted law and procedure, although it is doubtful whether these changes were sufficient for this purpose (if constitutional procedure alone can ever be, faced with highly determined opponents).

Athenian politics seems to have been extraordinarily intensive and competitive. Further, those who dominated the Assembly and Council tended to be of 'high' birth or rank, an elite from wealthy and well-established families, who had ample time to cultivate their contacts and pursue their interests. Since power was not structured by a firm constitutional and governmental system, political battles often took a highly personal form, often ending in the physical removal of opponents through ostracism or death (Finley, 1983, pp. 118–19). It is easy to exaggerate the frequency of these battles, to overstress the representativeness of Xenophon's narrative as an account of Athenian politics, and to forget that Athens enjoyed relatively long periods of political stability. None the less, Athens's political stability is probably to be explained less in terms of the internal workings of the political system, and more in terms of its history as a successful 'conquest-state'.[8] Successful military engagement accompanied the development of Athens; there were few years without war or military conflict. And military success brought material benefits to nearly all strata of the Athenian citizenry, which no doubt contributed to the formation of common ground among them, ground which is likely to have been quite solid – while victory lasted.

## The critics

Citizens' equal rights to participate in the Assembly, to be heard before it and to hold public office, while they certainly did not come close to creating equal power for all citizens, were sufficient in themselves to be regarded with dismay by Athens's most famous critics, among them Plato. Plato's indictment of democracy in *The Republic* is worth dwelling on for a moment, for it contains criticisms that are still often levelled at democracy if it is taken to mean something more than a vote on periodic occasions, and even by some (legal democrats) if it is taken to mean merely the latter.

Plato's youth was overshadowed by the Peloponnesian war, which ended in defeat for Athens. Disillusioned with the city's demise, and with the deteriorating standards of leadership, morality and law, culminating in the trial and death of Socrates in 399 BC, Plato came ever more to the view that political control must be placed in the hands of a minority (Lee, 1974, pp. 11ff). He set out his views against a backdrop of four types of constitution: oligarchy (a system of rule modelled on Sparta's military aristocracy), timocracy (rule by the wealthy), democracy (rule by the people) and tyranny (rule by a single dictator). In discussing democracy, Plato was essentially drawing on his experience in Athens. While he was critical of aspects of all four constitutions, he was scathing about democracy, which he defined as a form of society which 'treats all men as equal, whether they are equal or not' and ensures that 'every individual is free to

[8] All these points are made superbly by Finley (1983).

do as he likes' (Plato, *The Republic*, pp. 375, 376).[9] This commitment to 'political equality' and 'liberty' is, according to Plato, the hallmark of democracy and the basis of its most regrettable characteristics.

Democracy has a series of interconnected failings (see Lee, 1974, pp. 27–30). These can be unfolded from, among other sources, the two famous metaphors in *The Republic* of the ship's captain (p. 282) and the keeper of a 'large and powerful animal' (p. 288). It is worth beginning with the tale of the ship's captain.

> Suppose the following to be the state of affairs on board a ship or ships. The captain [or ship-owner] is larger and stronger than any of the crew, but a bit deaf and short-sighted, and similarly limited in seamanship. The crew are all quarrelling with each other about how to navigate the ship, each thinking he ought to be at the helm; they have never learned the art [or the skill or technique] of navigation and cannot say that anyone ever taught it them, or that they spent any time studying it; indeed they say it can't be taught and are ready to murder anyone who says it can. They spend all their time milling round the captain and doing all they can to get him to give them the helm. If one faction is more successful than another, their rivals may kill them and throw them overboard, lay out the honest captain with drugs or drink or in some other way, take control of the ship, help themselves to what's on board, and turn the voyage into the sort of drunken pleasure-cruise you would expect. Finally, they reserve their admiration for the man who knows how to lend a hand in controlling the captain by force or fraud; they praise his seamanship and navigation and knowledge of the sea and condemn everyone else as useless. They have no idea that the true navigator must study the seasons of the year, the sky, the stars, the winds and all the other subjects appropriate to his profession if he is to be really fit to control a ship; and they think that it's quite impossible to acquire the professional skill needed for such control (whether or not they want it exercised) and that there's no such thing as an art of navigation. With all this going on aboard aren't the sailors on any such ship bound to regard the true navigator as a word-spinner and a star-gazer, of no use to them at all? (Plato, *The Republic*, p. 282)

The 'true navigator' denotes the minority who, equipped with the necessary skill and expertise, has the strongest claim to rule legitimately. For the people (the crew) conduct their affairs on impulse, sentiment and prejudice. They have neither the experience nor the knowledge for sound navigation, that is, political judgement. In addition, the only leaders they are capable of admiring are sycophants: 'politicians ... are duly honoured ... [if] they profess themselves the people's friends' (*The Republic*, p. 376). All who 'mix with the crowd and want to be popular with it' can be directly 'compared ... to the sailors' (p. 283). There can be no proper leadership in a democracy; leaders depend on popular favour and they will, accordingly, act to sustain their own popularity and their own positions. Political leadership is enfeebled by acquiescence to popular demands and by the basing of political strategy on what can be 'sold'. Careful judgements,

[9] Note the equation of 'individuals' with 'all men' when Plato is, in fact, referring here to male citizens.

difficult decisions, uncomfortable options, unpleasant truths will of necessity be generally avoided. Democracy marginalizes the wise.

The claims of liberty and political equality are, furthermore, inconsistent with the maintenance of authority, order and stability. When individuals are free to do as they like and demand equal rights irrespective of their capacities and contributions, the result in the short run will be the creation of an attractively diverse society. However, in the long run the effect is an indulgence of desire and a permissiveness that erodes respect for political and moral authority. The young no longer fear and respect their teachers; they constantly challenge their elders and the latter 'ape the young' (*The Republic*, p. 383). In short, 'the minds of citizens become so sensitive that the least vestige of restraint is resented as intolerable, till finally . . . in their determination to have no master they disregard all laws' (p. 384). 'Insolence' is called 'good breeding, licence liberty, extravagance generosity, and shamelessness courage' (p. 380). A false 'equality of pleasures' leads 'democratic man' to live from day to day. Accordingly, social cohesion is threatened, political life becomes more and more fragmented and politics becomes riddled with factional disputes. Intensive conflict between sectional interests inevitably follows as each faction presses for its own advantage rather than that of the state as a whole. A comprehensive commitment to the good of the community and social justice becomes impossible.

This state of affairs invariably leads to endless intrigue, manoeuvring and political instability: a politics of unbridled desire and ambition. All involved claim to represent the interests of the community, but all in fact represent themselves and a selfish lust for power. Those with resources, whether from wealth or from a position of authority, will, Plato thought, inevitably find themselves under attack; and the conflict between rich and poor will become particularly acute. In these circumstances, the disintegration of democracy is, he contended, likely. 'Any extreme is likely to produce a violent reaction . . . so from an extreme of liberty one is likely to get an extreme of subjection' (*The Republic*, p. 385). In the struggle between factions, leaders are put forward to advance particular causes, and it is relatively easy for these popular leaders to demand 'a personal bodyguard' to preserve themselves against attack. With such assistance, the popular champion is a short step from grasping 'the reins of state'. As democracy plunges into dissension and conflict, popular champions can be seen to offer clarity of vision, firm direction and the promise to quell all opposition. It becomes a tempting option to support the tyrant of one's own choice. But, of course, once possessed of state power tyrants have a habit of attending solely to themselves.

For Plato tyranny in itself was not a stable resolution to the problems of democracy. Tyrants are rarely 'true navigators'. In the second well-known metaphor involving the 'large and powerful animal' (the mass of the people), Plato makes it clear that it is not enough for its keeper to know how to control the beast by a study of its moods, wants and habits. If the animal is to be properly cared for and trained it is important to know which of the creature's tastes and desires are 'admirable or shameful, good or bad, right or wrong' (*The Republic*, p. 288). Plato's position, in brief, is that the problems of the world cannot be

resolved until philosophers (the class of 'guardians') rule; for only they, when fully educated and trained, have the deliberative faculty to harmonize all elements of life under 'the rule of wisdom'. Following Socrates, Plato believed that 'virtue is knowledge'; that is, that 'the good life', for both individuals and collectivities, is an objective phenomenon: it exists independently of the diverse states of being at any given moment and can be grasped through systematic study. It is the philosopher's rigorously acquired knowledge that justifies his suitability for power. It is his capacity to arrange things in the most advantageous way that recommends that the principle of government be the principle of enlightened despotism.

The details of Plato's position need not concern us here at any length; it will suffice to know that his position in *The Republic* is motivated by the desire to answer the question 'What is justice?' Starting from a conception of a natural division of labour in which classes of individuals can find their proper role (roughly as rulers, soldiers or labourers), the task set for the philosopher becomes one of investigating this division in order (1) to encourage the particular virtues proper to each kind of labour (wisdom, courage, temperance), and (2) to ensure that individuals perform their correct functions. Individuals and states are conceived as organic wholes in which, when the whole is healthy, it is possible for people to perform their functions, satisfy their needs, fulfil themselves and, thus, dwell in an efficient, secure and strong state (see Ryle, 1967). Under these circumstances justice can prevail and the good life can be realized (see Annas, 1981).

In Plato's view and, more generally, in ancient Greek thought, it is worth bearing in mind that the freedom the state secures is not so much for the individual *per se*, but for his ability to fulfil his role in the universe. Such a theory differs markedly, as one commentator aptly noted, 'from one which pictures social relations in terms of contract or agreement [between human beings as "individuals"] and which therefore conceives the state as primarily concerned with maintaining liberty of choice' (Sabine, 1963, p. 49). This notion, dominant in the liberal tradition from the seventeenth century, would have been anathema to Plato. His work defends the idea of a harmonious unity between 'the public' and 'the private'. The state secures the basis for the citizen to practise his calling.

The position Plato set out in *The Republic* was modified in subsequent works, notably in *The Statesman* and *The Laws*. These books acknowledge that, in an actual as opposed to an ideal state, rule cannot be sustained without some form of popular consent and participation. The importance of the rule of law as a mode of circumscribing the legitimate scope of those in positions of 'public' power – philosopher-kings – is also affirmed. Significantly, a theory of a 'mixed state', combining elements of monarchy and democracy, was introduced, anticipating positions later developed by Aristotle and Renaissance republicans.[10] Plato even devised a system of proportional voting which later

[10] The idea of a 'mixed state', deploying different principles of organization in order to counter one another and achieve a balance of political forces, is of course of great significance in the history of political theory and practice. Plato may have been the first to elaborate this idea, although this cannot be confirmed. The theory of a 'mixed state', or separation of powers, will be discussed later when the thought of Machiavelli, Locke and Montesquieu is examined.

was to find a parallel in the writings of figures like John Stuart Mill. But these ideas were not on the whole developed systematically, and Plato's attempt to introduce an element of democracy into his conception of a desirable system of rule did not amount to a novel democratic model.

The classical model of democracy (summarized in model I) and its critique have both had an enduring impact on modern Western political thought: the former as a source of inspiration for many democratic thinkers and the latter as a warning of the dangers of democratic politics. However, neither the model nor its critique had immediate theoretical and practical influence beyond the life of the ancient city-states. The model itself did not re-enter European political thought until the Italian Renaissance and the flourishing of the Italian city-republics, and it was not until Rousseau (1712–78) and, later still, Marx (1818–83) and Engels (1820–95) that many aspects of the idea of direct citizen participation were fully re-examined, rearticulated and readvocated (see chs 2 and 4 below). Plato's critique, along with the critical reflections of other Greek political thinkers, has had a particularly profound influence in relatively recent times. For his writings about the moral limitations of democracy 'have never', as one commentator aptly noted, 'been surpassed in force and urgency' (Dunn, 1979, p. 17). How seriously we must take the critique and its application to other democratic models is something that will have to be returned to later. Certainly, positions similar in spirit to that of Plato's have been of the utmost significance

**In sum: model I**

***Classical Democracy***

*Principle(s) of justification*

Citizens should enjoy political equality in order to be free to rule and be ruled in turn

*Key features*

- Direct participation of citizens in legislative and judicial functions
- Assembly of citizens has sovereign power
- The scope of sovereign power to include all the common affairs of the city
- Multiple methods of selection of candidates for public office (direct election, lot, rotat
- No distinctions of privilege to differentiate ordinary citizens and public officials
- With the exception of positions connected to warfare, the same office not to be held than twice by the same individual
- Short terms of office for all
- Payment for public services

*General conditions*

- Small city-state with agricultural hinterland
- Slave economy creating 'free' time for citizens
- Domestic service, that is, the labour of women, freeing men for public duties
- Restriction of citizenship to relatively small numbers

processes while larger areas with significant populations are progressively mediated by representative mechanisms. The possibilities for direct participatory democracy in communities and workplaces are clearly extensive compared to those which exist in highly differentiated social, economic and political circumstances (see Beetham, 1993; Phillips, 1993). However, the simple juxtaposition of participatory with liberal representative democracy is now in flux given developments in deliberative theory and in information technology, which has put simultaneous two-way communication within reach of larger populations. The merits of participatory democracy have to be re-examined now aspects of its technical feasibility are closer at hand. As one commentator has recently argued, it is unacceptable to dismiss all types of direct democracy as if they could be realized only through 'unmediated popular voting on a take it or leave it basis'; for direct democracy can take several different institutional forms, just as liberal representative democracy does (Budge, 1993, pp. 136–49). While some of these forms are open to serious reservations, it is possible to conceive, for instance, a type of party-based deliberative direct democracy in which the electorate would be able, in the first instance, to consider and choose among competing parties for office and, in the second, to act like a parliamentary assembly – deliberating over and voting directly on proposed legislation set out and advocated by the party in office. The stability of such a political system would require a complex set of rules and procedures to be in place, but these are not in principle difficult to specify (see Budge, 1993, pp. 136–55; 1996). In practice, of course, a great many issues remain unresolved and, at the time of writing, they are clearly open to extensive debate. (For a range of views on this matter, see Held, 1993c, part II; Fishkin, 1991; Saward, 2003.)

Among the outstanding issues are these: How should the role of political representatives and citizens be reconceived if citizens gain new direct powers of deliberation and decision-making on controversial public issues? What should be the balance between the extension of consultative procedures and decision-making mechanisms? If representative and direct democracy are combined progressively through the extension of citizens' juries, referenda and the like, what mechanisms and institutions can ensure independent deliberative or electoral procedures? How can these procedures be satisfactorily scrutinized and regulated? Who should frame the issues and questions put to citizens' bodies? What should be the balance between citizens' rights to initiate and veto legislation? How should these considerations be weighed in relation to other important political values such as fairness, efficacy and efficiency? Within the framework of democratic autonomy, an experimental view would have to be taken of the new rules, technologies and procedures; dogmatism about any of these issues might risk weakening those aspects of our political traditions which need protection and nurturing – such as the notion of an impartial and circumscribed political authority, and the maintenance of many key liberal democratic rights and obligations (see ch. 3) – without necessarily gaining new and effective political resources.

### *The entrenchment of democracy in economic life: reframing the market?*

Democracy is challenged by powerful sets of economic relations and organizations which can – by virtue of the bases of their operations – deflect or distort democratic processes and outcomes. Accordingly, if democracy is to prevail, the key groups and associations of the economy will have to be rearticulated with political institutions so that they become part of the democratic process – adopting, within their very *modus operandi*, a structure of rules, principles and practices compatible with democracy. The possibility of such a structure depends upon groups and economic associations functioning within agreed and delimited frameworks (cf. Hirst, 1990, pp. 75–8). What is at issue is the inscription of the principles, rules and procedures of democracy and democratic autonomy into the organizational rules and procedures of companies, and of all other forms of economic association.

If democratic processes and relations are to be sustained, corporations will have to uphold, *de jure* and *de facto*, a commitment to the requirements of democratic autonomy. What this entails is that companies, while pursuing strategic objectives, must operate within a framework which does not violate the requirement to treat their employees and customers as free and equal persons. But how exactly should this be conceived? What would constitute such a framework? How can a common structure of political action be built into corporate and market relations?

In the first instance, it is useful to distinguish between different types of property and, in particular, between productive and financial property, on the one hand, and consumption property (items possessed for private consumption), on the other. The principle of autonomy requires the rigorous pursuit of questions concerning the structure of productive and financial property, but it certainly does not presuppose the rigorous pursuit of such issues with respect to items we choose to consume in daily life, whether these are shirts, washing machines or personal computers. Entitlements to consumption property need to be separated from the right to unlimited accumulation of economic resources. Rousseau was one of the first to make this argument powerfully (see pp. 46–7 above; cf. Connolly, 1981, ch. 7). Recently, the point has been argued incisively by Dahl, who affirms that we cannot leap from an 'entitlement to secure possession of the shirt on my back or the cash in my pocket to a fundamental moral right to acquire shares in IBM and therewith the standard rights of ownership that shareholdings legally convey' (Dahl, 1985, pp. 74–5). A choice in favour of 'the standard rights of ownership' is a choice against political equality and a common structure of political action. If political equality is a moral right, so too is greater equality in the conditions governing productive and financial resources. Recognition of the necessity to transform aspects of the ownership and control of the productive and financial systems is fundamental to the possibility of an open, unbiased political agenda. Without clear restrictions on the private governance and use of economic resources, a necessary condition of democracy cannot be met.

However, there are further complex questions to be raised about the proper form of ownership and control of economic goods. There are sound reasons for

criticizing and worrying about high concentrations of both private and state forms of ownership (see chs 3, 4 and 7). Other options, for instance, cooperative forms of ownership, involving the collective possession of enterprises by work groups, might be more compatible with democratic autonomy than either state or private ownership alone. But a thoroughly convincing case for social or cooperative ownership has yet to be made. Among the central questions which require further examination are the following: What exactly are the nature and boundaries of an enterprise? Would all existing companies have to be broken up into small units (a wholly unrealistic prospect) for cooperative ownership to be viable? How can consumer preferences – other than through the market – be taken into account and what weight should they be given? How can the requirements of cooperative ownership be fully reconciled with the requirements of democratic control and/or efficient management?[10] Forms of ownership, and experiments with different types, need more rigorous attention, as do their respective implications for the distribution of political power (see Ruggie, 2003; Held, 2004).

### *Democratic autonomy: the tyranny of sameness?*

Does the pursuit of the principle of autonomy and a common structure of political action entail that people should always be treated in a similar way by the state? State outcomes may well be unequal for individuals, and justifiably so. From the perspective of democratic autonomy, to secure the conditions which enable individuals to play an active role as citizens requires different sets of strategies and policies for different sets of people. In the first instance, it will be necessary to treat those who currently control vast amounts of productive or financial property, with minimum public accountability, unequally. But the matter goes much further than this. For instance, if women are to enjoy 'free and equal' conditions, not only will the typical circumstances under which they bear and raise children have to be transformed, but the traditional privileges of men with respect to jobs, income and access to cultural activities, among other things, will have to be eroded as well. This double-sided policy process – of alleviating the conditions of the least powerful while restricting the scope and circumstances of the most powerful – would apply to a variety of areas marked by systematic inequality (from wealth and gender to race and ethnicity), where it could be shown that such inequality *undermines* or *artificially limits* the pursuit of democratic deliberation and decision-making by others.

But does the creation of greater equality of political and economic circumstances mean, as is often claimed, that people must or should eventually do all the same things, pursue all the same activities and live under identical conditions – in short, be the same? Is the pursuit of a common structure of political action the pursuit of a tyrannically conceived order in which all people

[10] It could be objected that the above account fails to examine whether or not private property, and private property in productive resources, is essential for the achievement of a number of important ends, e.g. efficiency and innovation. There is not the space here to investigate all the issues involved in such an objection, but they are examined by Dahl, who develops a compelling argument about many of the problems (1985).

are reduced to similar status and similar activities? It is unquestionably the case that a commitment to democratic autonomy entails a commitment to reducing the privileges of the privileged if these restrict the participative possibilities of others and deny their capacity for democratic engagement. But it would not involve, and would be quite incompatible with, an attack on personal, social, cultural and (in certain respects) economic 'differences'. The *raison d'être* of the model of democratic autonomy is to enhance the choices and benefits which flow from living in a society that does not leave large categories of citizens in a permanently subordinate position, at the mercy of forces entirely outside their control. Furthermore, if broadly common political conditions were established, it would not follow that the correct and only principle of justice would be the constant and further pursuit of such conditions. It is going to be a matter for citizens themselves to consider and decide, within the framework set down by the principle of autonomy, how exactly goods and services are to be distributed (cf. Pateman, 1985, p. 188).

However, it must again be stressed that additional theoretical work is required on these problems. If political equality and democratic life require greater equality of economic and social conditions, the exact nature of the principles of social justice will have to be spelt out more carefully and their scope thoroughly examined. While the model of democratic autonomy clearly circumscribes the direction of distributive forms of state action, it remains to be specified in what precise ways and with what order of priorities. In addition, the many *practical* issues of *policy* involved require careful thought. New types of social and economic policies and new ways of implementing them will have to be developed. The point is not just to interpret or change the world, but to explore the justifiable *and* feasible ways in which it can be altered.

### *Democratic autonomy: limited autonomy?*

In any given political system there are clearly limits to the extent of liberty which citizens can enjoy. What distinguishes the model of democratic autonomy from many of the other models discussed in this book is a fundamental commitment to the principle that the liberty of some individuals must not be allowed at the expense of others, where others can be a majority or significant minority of citizens. In this sense, the concept of liberty presupposed by the model of democratic autonomy allows in some respects a smaller range of actions for certain groups of individuals. If the principle of autonomy is to be realized, then some people will no longer have the scope to, for instance, pollute the environment of others, accumulate vast unregulated resources, or pursue their own life opportunities at the expense of those of their lovers or wives. The liberty of persons within the framework of democratic autonomy will have to be one of progressive accommodation to the liberty of others. While, therefore, the scope of action may be more limited for some in certain respects, it will be substantially enhanced for others.

It does not follow from this, as is sometimes remarked about related theoretical positions, that such a fundamental transformation of life opportunities entails the end of the division of labour or the end of a role for

specialized competencies. As one critic rightly commented: 'a political future which promised to dispense with expertise will be necessarily an idiot's promise or a promise made in the deepest bad faith' (Dunn, 1979, p. 19). The model of democratic autonomy is and must be fully compatible with people choosing to develop particular talents and skills. The conditions of such choices will be different, but this does not mean that there will be no choices. Moreover, the model of democratic autonomy presupposes explicitly the existence of centralized decision-making in government. Democratic autonomy does not promote the levelling of all authority and of those clusters of institutions which can provide skilled, predictable administration. Weber's argument about the importance of the latter in preventing public affairs becoming a quagmire of infighting among factions, wholly inefficient in settling pressing collective issues, is particularly significant (see ch. 5 above). But the *form* and *structure* of such institutions would have to be altered. It would, again, be fallacious to claim we know exactly how and in what precise ways this would happen. We need to reflect and deliberate much more on types and forms of possible political organization and their connecting relations with markets, when the latter function within a framework of broad accountability.

### *Legitimacy: would democratic autonomy create political legitimacy?*

Political order today, as argued in chapters 5–7, is not achieved through common value systems, or general respect for the authority of the state, or legitimacy, or, by contrast, simple brute force; rather, it is the outcome of a complex web of interdependencies between political, economic and social institutions and activities which divide power centres and which create multiple pressures to comply. State power is a central aspect of these structures but it is not the only key variable.

The precariousness of 'government' in contemporary circumstances is linked both to the limits of state power in the context of national and international conditions and to the remoteness, distrust and scepticism that are expressed about existing institutional arrangements, including the effectiveness of liberal representative democracy. The institutions of liberal representative democracy remain crucial to the formal control of the state, but the disjuncture between the agencies which possess formal control and those with actual control, between the power that is claimed for the people and their limited actual power, between the promises of representatives and their actual performance, is striking. The perception of this disjuncture contributed to the formation of a number of powerful social movements – including the women's movement, the environmental movement and the anti-globalization or social justice movement – which have pressed and continue to press for greater spheres of autonomy and accountability in politics. These movements, in addition, have been an important impetus to those – from segments of the labour movement and civil society to the innovative wings of political parties – who have had related objectives. But in the context of the many factors which fragment opposition forces, it is, of course, hard to predict how successful these will be: the 'balance' of political life always depends on debate, negotiation and conflict, and its

results cannot, therefore, be easily read off from a consideration of current circumstances.

The notion of an 'ideal normative agreement' was introduced in chapter 5; it is an agreement to follow rules and laws on the grounds that they are the regulations we would have agreed to in ideal conditions, with, for instance, all the knowledge we would like and all the opportunity we would want to discuss the requirements of others (pp. 155–6, 197–8 above). This idea is useful because it provides a basis for a 'thought experiment' into how people would interpret their needs, and which rules and laws they would consider justified, under conditions of unconstrained knowledge and discussion. It enables us to ask what the circumstances would have to be like for people to follow rules and laws they think right, justified and worthy of respect. It conjoins with the arguments of those deliberative theorists who seek to test candidate principles of social and political order against the requirements of impartiality (see pp. 239–41 above). Surveying the issues and evidence explored in Parts One and Two of this volume, it can be said that a political system implicated deeply in the creation and reproduction of systematic inequalities of power and opportunities will rarely (the exceptions perhaps being occasions like war) enjoy sustained support by groups other than those whom it directly privileges. Or, more contentiously, only a political order that places the transformation of those inequalities at its centre will enjoy legitimacy in the long run. The principle of autonomy, enacted through a double-sided process of democratization, might be the basis for such an order. The pursuit of political legitimacy, of a political order marked by respect for authority and law, suggests the importance of pursuing the model of democratic autonomy. Critical reflection must, at this point, link up with public debate and deliberative politics if this analytically proposed account is to become part of the democratic conversation and encompass all those whom it seeks to address. Only under the latter circumstances can a theoretical model become an actuality in the understanding and practices of citizens.