Democratic Paradigms and the Horizons of Democratization

Craig Browne

In his posing the question of democracy, Claude Lefort recalls that in its proper meaning democracy is a political regime.¹ Like comparable regimes, democracy constitutes the entire way of life of society by instituting a horizon of symbolic meaning. The conjunction between symbolic meaning and a corresponding way of life importantly extends the notion of the political and implies that democracy should not simply be equated with a particular set of the overt structures of power. In Lefort’s words, the idea of political regime is meant to evoke “those mores and beliefs that testify to the existence of a set of implicit norms determining notions of just and unjust, good and evil, desirable and undesirable, noble and ignoble.”² This insight into the form of the political and the ensuing complex alignment of the social field and associated practices will be utilised in the following analysis of the nexus between contemporary models of democracy and processes of democratization. There are broadly two ways that the parameters of a model of democracy can change, but only one of these draws on the power of democratic invention. One mode of transformation results from external developments that may promote democracy or, as has been almost exclusively the case, threaten the persistence of democracy and necessitate some adaptive change. In some contemporary discourses of democracy, globalization appears to be such an external threat. The other way that the parameters of a democratic model changes is, of course, through internal processes of democratization. Anthony Giddens elegantly summarizes these processes in the phrase ‘democratizing of democracy’.³ Although this analysis examines both modes of altering the parameters of democratic models, it privileges the analysis of the internally generated changes, because they can themselves be attributed to democracy.

It is necessary to elucidate further the basic meaning of democracy as a political regime in order to question the contemporary misattributions of democracy and to establish the context in which a number of recent models of democracy have emerged. As we have seen, in Lefort’s view, the political is broader than traditional politics, being the “double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured. It appears in the sense that the process whereby society is ordered and unified across its divisions becomes visible.”⁴ In most regimes the mode of the appearance of the political obscures its institution. The
institutionalized definitions of the realm of politics and the themes taken to concern politics have largely concealed the "principle which generate the overall configuration" of society. The political has been 'elaborated with reference' to various social imaginaries and the closure they instantiate, such as the imaginaries of theological interpretations of the social order and other modes of 'world-making'. This explication of the political is contrary to these imaginaries' basic horizon of meaning, as their closure takes the form of denying the social origin of the unity and divisions of society through the positing of some transcendent source of meaning and legitimacy. "Every religion," Lefort contends, "states in its own way that human society can only open on to itself by being held in an opening it did not create." Given this characterization, democracy can be seen to differ from other political regimes in one decisive respect: it is a difference that animates its basic, though elusive, principle of the autonomous self-governance by the people. Democracy is a political regime that accepts openness and the indeterminacy of its own institution. For democracy cannot appeal to a source of justification beyond itself—the democratic political institution of society. Accordingly, the democratizing potential of any model of democracy is critical; the process of definition and establishing the parameters of democratic rule contains, as Keenan has argued in detail, a possibility for a closure and veiling of democracy.

Lefort's characterisation of a democracy is partly inspired by de Tocqueville's claim that democracy—in the form of the equality of conditions—makes democratisation an almost unstoppable process. Significantly, the uncontrollable and potentially unlimited consequences of autonomous self-governance are registered, according to Lefort, in the social imaginary of democracy. This indeterminacy of democracy is rendered visible in the site of power remaining unoccupied. In other words, unlike the embodiment of power in the sovereign figure of authority, the 'locus of power' in democracy "becomes an empty place." The modern experience of totalitarian regimes reveals, Lefort believes, that democracy presupposes the instantiation of a principle of division and the creation of a social space for discord. Now, one need not accept Lefort's conception of democratic political form to recognize that his analysis points to how democracy depends on the very processes of discerning its limited realization, and that the curtailment of the scope for democratization is one the preconditions for democracy to degenerate into an ideology of political legitimation. Without seeking to exaggerate the uniqueness of the contemporary social-historical conjuncture, this tension seems to characterize the question of democratic futures. The horizon of symbolic meaning that is now associated with the signification of democracy is potentially consequential in its capacity to reshape the configuration of social relations. Yet, the diffusion of this imaginary may mean that the signification of democracy is mobilised to conceal a heteronomous division of society and the institutionalization of the limited, in Max Weber's terms, 'passive' democratization of formal equality before the law and individual private rights.

Democracy became the single political form of organization that was almost unconditionally and universally accepted as legitimate during the last decades of the twentieth century. Political legitimacy became generally equated with the satisfaction of the conditions of democracy; this equation is made in spite of the evident discrepancy in most national societies between the normative principles of democracy and the social-structural conditions that tend to undermine
them. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this discrepancy between the appeal of democratic principles and their limited satisfaction pertains even in relation to the minimal conditions of liberal democratic governance. Indeed, it is not just in those nation states that have recently undergone a ‘democratizing’ transition to liberal democratic political arrangements that there is an inadequate institutionalization of the unimpeded political participation of citizens in the determination of majority rule and the right of all individuals to equal treatment. In response to the paradox of the universal appeal of democracy and the dilemmas of its realisation, there has been a proliferation of conceptions, definitions and models in recent social and political theory which attempt to specify the conditions for the actualization of democracy.\(^{11}\) One of the distinctive features of these contributions is the emergence of interpretations of democracy as less a fixed structure of political rule and more as an orientation that shapes social relations in general and that is manifested in contemporary culture.\(^{12}\) For this reason, democracy does not have a uniform meaning in these discourses. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly the case that the theorizing of democratic forms alongside formal political institutions has been partly motivated by the political contestation of new social movements and broader socio-cultural tendencies within late-capitalist liberal democracies. The latter tendencies have promoted transformations in hierarchical relations and authoritarian social structures. The lack of democracy has been highlighted in relation to the managerial control of the labour process, the relationships of parents and children in the family, the organization of education and schooling, the role of the media in the public sphere, and even the entire domain of civil society. It had previously been possible from the modern state-centred conception of democratic governance to consider the evolution from liberal democracy to the social democracy of the welfare state to be part of a historical developmental sequence in the democratizing of society. Now, although it has a radically different meaning and even antithetical consequences, the current phase of neo-liberal globalization has likewise undermined certain expectations concerning the democratization of capitalist society through the national state. In this way, the altering of the external and internal parameters of models of democracy has come to the foreground of contemporary theoretical debates and everyday consciousness.

David Held’s definition of ‘models’ attempts to reflect the increasing complexity of the assumptions surrounding democracy and the difficulty involved in determining parameters.\(^{13}\) Drawing on C. B. Macpherson’s analysis, Held comments that ‘models’ refer to “a theoretical construction designed to reveal and explain the chief elements of a democratic form and its underlying structure or relations.”\(^{14}\) An aspect of life or set of institutions can only be properly understood in terms of its relations with other social phenomena. Models are, accordingly, “complex ‘networks’ of concepts and generalizations about aspects of the political, economic and social.”\(^{15}\) In this perspective, the determination and assessment of models of democracy are not bound to the typical distinctions between the normative and the empirical modes of political theorizing. Instead, models can involve the confrontation, as well as the ‘intermingling’, of the normative and the descriptive statements. Hence, properly understood, models of democracy do not just specify institutional forms and procedure; they contain the nucleus of an interpretation of the societal context. It is in terms of this interpretative horizon that models establish their internal conditions of legitimation. In order to appreciate how the
parameters of democratic models shift and potential realignments, it may be useful to apply the distinction Johann Arnason draws between the ‘paradigm’ and ‘horizon’ of modernity. Arnason’s distinction points to the way that democracy is a dimension of modernity—one that is limited by other dimensions of modernity. At the same time, these other dimensions can also be subject to democratizing tendencies. In fact, Arnason has criticized Lefort’s notion of a modern democratic regime and its tendency to subsume other ‘formative factors’ from the standpoint of the possibilities of these multiple dimensions of modernity. He believes that “the absence of clear contrasts with other structural principles blurs the contours of democracy itself and leads Lefort to define it in primarily negative terms—as a rupture and as a permanently self-questioning form of political life, rather than as a project or a positive reorientation.”

Based on this appreciation of the horizon of interpretation associated with its paradigmatic modern form, the contrasts between the two modes of altering the parameters of democratic models will be clarified initially by way of the distinction Macpherson and Held draw between the ‘protective’ and the developmental versions of liberal democracy. This distinction is especially relevant to any attempted assessment of the implications of the political and historical circumstances that have seen the idea of democracy, especially liberal democracy, become universalized. Geoffrey Stokes suggests that liberal protective democracy does not imply any further democratizing of society, precisely because in this model democracy is instituted to protect other values and ‘political ends’ that have a higher priority.

The main internal aim and justification of theories of protective democracy is to protect individual citizens from arbitrary rule and oppression by government, as well as from infringements upon individual liberty from other citizens. Democracy is an institutional instrument, based upon actual or implied contracts, for protecting the legal and political rights of individuals. In addition, all are united by their understanding of democracy as a procedure for choosing governments, and a preference for a minimal role for citizen participation.

Given that the recent changes of different national societies to liberal democracy were the product of various conjunctions of internal and external factors, it is necessary to accentuate the difference between democratic changes and changes to democratic forms of governance. It is the latter that is usually signified in the notion of a ‘third wave’ of democratization, since this generally refers to the spread of liberal democratic institutions as a result of the transitions from authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Southern Europe and then the subsequent collapse of communist regimes. In basically all these cases, the democratic model adopted has been liberal democratic, with some variation between protective and developmental. Despite the apparent universal appeal of democracy, not all of the nation states that were a product of the second wave of decolonizing democratization would now be classified as liberal democracies. But, in my opinion, what is more surprising about the ‘third wave’ transitions to ‘democracy’ is the paucity of political experimentation, and this uniformity also distinguishes it from the second wave of democratization. Indeed,
the common denominator of these recent changes is the virtual absence of any alternative political form to liberal democracy. It contrasts significantly with the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century transformations; these transitions drew also on various nationalist and socialist interpretations of popular sovereignty, modernization and political legitimacy. The absence at the level of the nation state of political experimentation does not justify an ‘end of history’ scenario; it can instead be attributed to the current institutional and ideological constellation of the global integration of the system of nation states. The institutionalizing of the liberal ‘protective model’ seems to complement processes of the privatization of property and it has often led to the subordination of the further democratization of the social order that may be constitutive of a shift in democratic models. In other words, democratization is effectively subordinated to the constraints the capitalist market imposes on social and economic reproduction. The immanent limitations of the protective model of democracy mean that it has a certain functional significance for capitalist development and a relative, though never total, indifference to the problems that class and other inequalities constitute for democratic self-determination.

Under the conditions of the third wave of democratization, there has never been a purely protective democracy. Rather, variations in liberal democratic structures result from different nation-building projects, the proximity—especially in Europe—to transnational structures of governance and the broader cultural background of national communities that may be considered part of an overarching civilization. The substantial differences between third wave liberal democracies are primarily due to the respective historical, cultural and geographical contexts of nation states. Despite the limited political experimentation, there are significant variations as a result of the ‘creative adaptation’ of liberal democratic structures, like the formation of representative legislative assemblies and the independence of the judiciary. These processes of institutionalization have yet to constitute anything like a new democratic model. Rather, the parameters of models of democracy have changed in these cases only to the extent that there is the multiplication of liberal democratic nation states. A potential consequence of this development is that the interaction between these states may be qualitatively different to those of authoritarian states. Indeed, a transformation of the legitimating conditions of international relations is clearly important for notions of a cosmopolitan global order founded on democratic principles. In response to sceptical political realist arguments and the theory of anarchical state relations, Held has suggested that cosmopolitan democracy should be understood as a tendency incipient to contemporary globalization, as well as belonging to a much longer-term historical project. The historical analogy Held draws with the long-term processes of the institutionalizing of other democratic models undoubtedly possesses considerable validity. Bjorn Wittrock has shown that it is only relatively recently that the majority of European states have satisfied the criteria of liberal democracy.

The cosmopolitan model presumes that the parameters of democracy are already shifting due to ‘globalization’ and ‘regionalization’ “undermining existing national forms of liberal democracy.” Beside the attempt to conceive political forms beyond the territorial principle of the nation state, what is distinctive about current models of cosmopolitan democracy is the attempt to bind together two processes so that they are mutually reinforcing. The two
processes are the deepening democracy within states and the extending of democracy across borders. Cosmopolitan models are ‘externally’ conditioned to the extent that they seek to subject to democratic governance the transnational institutions and global networks, like multinational corporations and financial trading, that influence the parameters of national social policies and the capacity of communities to be self-determining. Cosmopolitan democrats argue that such global institutions and networks require transnational regulation, and hence modes of global governance and especially cosmopolitan law. In this respect, the cosmopolitan model is also meant to protect national sovereignty. In other respects, the cosmopolitan model is more ambitious: “... unlike liberal-internationalist theory it is not concerned with the reform of global governance per se but rather with its reconstruction.”

In yet other respects, cosmopolitan democracy amalgamates facets of other democratic models; yet some of its proponents distinctively attempt to reinforce democratization within nation-states through the specification of corresponding global institutions. That is, these cosmopolitan perspectives argue that democratizing processes are intensified by the emergence of multiple sources of governance that are not tied to national sovereignty—like world courts, human rights tribunals, the social and labour regulations of the European Union, and so on. These institutions and legislation seek to uphold principles, such as human rights and civic participation, which cosmopolitan theorists believe are conducive to democratic practices within and across nation states. Of course, this development implies that these global political and legal institutions are themselves subject to democratic processes, rather than simply functioning according to the distribution of power and the strategic self-interest of international actors. A basic problem of all democratic models is defining the conditions of democratic rule and legitimation; cosmopolitan models rework or even dispense with the grounding of democracy in the territorial principle of national sovereignty. For instance, it has been suggested that in the future the territorial basis of democracy could be replaced by a functional conception organised by the deliberation and participation of interested parties to problems of global scale, like the environment and human rights.

From what has been said so far, it should be clear that liberal democracy is the dominant model today, because it specifies a set of minimal conditions for democratic governance and due to the fact that there has been an increase in the number of nation states that have institutionalized it. In particular, the paradigmatic position of liberal democracy has been reinforced by the extension of the category of rights and the consequent tendency to conceptualize democracy in terms of human rights and individual liberty. A major disjunction however, exists between the strictly ‘protective’ of citizens’ negative liberties model and the interpretation of liberal democracy as leading to other democratizing tendencies, such as mobilizing citizens in processes of governance and the extension of categories of persons eligible for rights and entitlements. In fact, the democratic credentials of the protective model of liberal democracy have been questioned on various different, but also overlapping, grounds. One line of criticism can be traced back to the ancient ‘classical’ models and later expressions of the participatory ideals of direct democracy. From these perspectives, the liberal democratic principle of representation introduces an essentially anti-democratic division between rulers and ruled, while further separations, like that between public and private, state
and civil society, reinforce the departure from effective self-rule by the people. For instance, Castoriadis has claimed that the original proponents of liberal representation did not in fact argue for such an institution on the grounds of democracy, since the divergence from the ancient principle was transparent to them. Rather, they argued for this liberal democratic institution on the basis of the requirements of expediency and the alleged inevitability social inequality. A similar line of argument is involved in the claim that in its actual functioning liberal democracy invariably involves the rule of elites and that the protective model takes little account of the structural asymmetries of power that undermine the pretensions to democratic rule in the interest of the majority. The many variations of this basically sociological critique of liberal political authority have had significant repercussions through their highlighting the substantive preconditions of the freedom and equality of citizens in a capitalist society. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that a common assumption of all other modern models of democracy is precisely that if liberal democracy amounts to a merely formal structure of citizenship rights and political authority without supplementary social conditions that promote freedom and equality, then the claim to democracy is liable to be systematically undermined—by private interests, the power of capital and the practical exclusion of a substantial proportion of citizens due to a lack of resources, information or social recognition. Social liberalism, social democracy and socialism amount to different responses to the modern discrepancy between formal democratic freedom and substantive social inequality.

Social liberalism and social democracy endorse the rights and entitlements of liberal democracy whilst specifying supplementary conditions that promote freedom and equality. T. H. Marshall’s understanding of how the instituting of the social rights of citizenship serves to enable the actualizing of the political rights of liberal democratic citizenship is indicative of a developmental conception. The liberal developmental model considers how the rights of citizenship do not merely involve the protection of the liberal state in order to preserve private autonomy; democratic citizenship in fact requires the fulfilment of civic obligations and active participation in public affairs. According to Stokes, a concern “for the common good lies at the heart of developmental democracy. As citizens pursue the common good, they also transform themselves and become more autonomous.” In the developmental liberal model, it is the responsibility of the state to in turn provide the resources necessary for the full participation of citizens. This entails undertaking measures to redress inequalities in the opportunities for realizing democratic rights. The recent ‘third way’ arguments for modernizing social democracy have arguably obscured some of its differences from social liberalism. Social democracy has traditionally placed even greater emphasis on the extent to which individual rights depend on membership of a community. In principle then, social democracy entails that private interests do not necessarily take precedence over the general interest of the community, although liberal democratic institutions are still presupposed. Similarly, the collective sense of democracy is emphasized in the priority social democracy gives to the value of equality. It aspires to extend the principle of equal treatment through universal provision. The social democratic model is largely shaped by two primary institutional structures of modernity: capitalism and the nation-state. In effect, social democracy aims
to modify the consequences of the class structure of capitalism through the directing and
organising power of the state. In a sense, for a large part of the twentieth century this feature
of social democracy seemed to converge with the developmental tendencies of modernizing
processes, because both the increasing complexity of social structures and the capitalist
business cycle itself seemed to require higher levels of administrative organization. The strains
on the welfare state in the later part of the twentieth century and the recent ‘third way’
and other social democratic responses to them have led to a reversal of this perspective on
the state at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The ‘contradictions’ (to borrow from
the title of Offe’s book) ‘of the welfare state’ and the modernizers of social democracy have
highlighted the instability intrinsic to the intended synthesis in the social democratic state
of maximising efficiency and satisfying the normative aspiration of equality.31 The third way
social democrats have defined efficiency less in terms of state planning and the modification
of the business cycle through demand management, but more in terms of recognizing the
role of market signalling in resource allocation and the entrepreneurial innovation of the
capitalist enterprise and new information technology.

There can be no doubt that the social democratic principles institutionalized in the
welfare state made capitalist societies more democratic (in the sense of expanding the
conditions of equal treatment and fairness). It is probably easy to exaggerate the extent to
which third way modernizers have changed the parameters of this model. Still, they are, to
be sure, responding to what Habermas has described as the conflict between the intention
of promoting autonomy and the bureaucratic means available to the welfare state.32 If this
analysis is broadly correct, it would seem that horizon of social democracy may remain
the same but the conditions of its realization have changed. The implications of this
suggestion are consistent with Stammer’s reflection on the traditional constituents of social
democracy and the assumptions that need to be rethought in light of the problem of global
governance. He suggests that alongside an acceptance of the capitalist system of production,
liberal democratic institutions and the commitment to redistributive measures intended to
redress inequalities, ‘traditional’ social democracy has three further characteristics: an elitist
“understanding of the potential relationship between people and political leadership and
tends to assume a top-down, hierarchical model of governance”; a statist ‘orientation’ in
‘foreign policy and international relations’ as well as in terms of ‘internally’ regulating and
intervening in the market to ‘mitigate’ inequalities and deprivation, and a ‘commitment’ to
methodological nationalism—“a privileging of ‘national’ levels of debate, analysis and policy
over other possible levels, whether local, regional or global.”33 These three characteristics
of traditional social democracy are indicative of the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ limitations of this
model of democracy. The elitism reflects the intention of realizing ‘democratic’ outcomes
through forms of managerial direction. It depends on a kind technocratic justification, rather
than arguments for extending democratic processes of participation. Similarly, even though
it has been critical to the program of democratically regulating capitalism, statism seems
limited in respect of the democratizing tendencies that have developed within civil society.
Methodological nationalism, as has been indicated already, confronts the challenge of global
processes and the tensions of sustaining democratic openness under these conditions.
One social democratic response to the challenges to methodological nationalism has been to broaden the parameters of its model and to institutionalize similarly regulatory and redistributive measures through transnational institutions. In other words, this is a social democratic variant of the cosmopolitan model, since it seeks to make transnational structures, like the European Union, social democratic in their orientation. This cosmopolitan extension has two clear limitations, and it also suggests that this ‘reconstruction’ has yet to satisfactorily address the issues of ‘statism’ and ‘elitism’. At present, most transnational structures suffer from an even greater democratic deficit than national structures. Second, transnational structures also have comparatively weaker governance and legislative powers. Whilst this weakness may disguise their democratic deficits, it also points to a potential inability of transnational institutions to approximate to social democracy altogether. Of course, this is to imply that transnational or global structures of governance should replicate at a higher level the formerly national forms of realizing social democracy. It may be possible to understand the preconditions of cosmopolitan social democracy somewhat differently. In my opinion, any determination of this possibility must be based on answers to the basic questions arising from the interconnections between globalization and democracy. Ultimately, the parameters of social democracy in the twenty-first century will be determined by the conclusions that are drawn about the extent to which this relationship of globalization and democracy transforms the class dynamic of capitalist societies and its mediation through the state.

In light of the considerations outlined, I want to comment briefly on the theoretical framing and practical-political implication of three models of democracy: deliberative democracy, associative democracy and creative democracy. I want to argue that these models contain varying potentials for the democratizing of capitalist society. However, the grounds for making this argument are still unsatisfactory; the analyses of models of democracy have tended to be conducted within normative political theory. The analysis below of these models reproduces this deficiency, because its focus is their internal potential to, in Giddens’ words, ‘democratise democracy’.34 The democratic deficiencies of social democratic elitism and statism have not only influenced the arguments of third way modernizers and cosmopolitans; the model of associative democracy can be considered a different response to the same set of considerations. Associative democrats have highlighted differentiations within a broader social democratic tradition and they have looked to the cooperative structures typical of guild socialism and the commitment to civic involvement characteristic of ethical socialism.35 Despite some variations in emphasis, associative models have a normative commitment to democratizing processes of social reproduction and social participation in civil society is considered intrinsically valuable for the development of democracy. April Carter outlines the central intuition of this model in the following comment:

Theorists of associative democracy seek to promote individual freedom, social justice and political participation, which are in their view undermined by excessive reliance either on the state or on the market... Associationalists would decentralize state power, transfer many existing state functions to citizens’ bodies and extend democracy to non-political spheres, in particular the workplace.”36
The social democratic commitment to universal provision, redistribution and the collective good is retained in most associative models. Although these commitments are critical to democracy, they point to the dilemma of the extent to which the state underpins the processes of the ‘decentralizing of state power’ and the means by which universal equality and fairness would be institutionalized and regulated. One way around this dilemma consists in tying the associative framework to that of the deliberative model. It likewise locates democratic potentials in civil society. The increasing prominence of models of deliberative democracy reflects important shifts in the conception of the subject of rights and entitlements. Deliberative democracy is allegedly promoted by recent paralegal and extra-parliamentary ‘democratic experiments’ like citizen juries, citizen polls, consultative bodies as well as new social movements and even changes in ‘intimate’ relations. Developing the implications of these initiatives, deliberative democracy promises to rectify the deficiencies of liberal democracy through enhancing public involvement. That is, the more recent extensions of the deliberative model seek to overcome the liberal limitation of democracy to the protection of negative liberty. This means, of course, substantially reversing the patterns of political apathy and indifference that have resulted from the apparent detachment of liberal and social democratic structures from the citizenry. In the most influential and elaborated version of this model, it is assumed that deliberation can only be effective on the basis of the full or complete involvement of citizens in the formation of public opinion.37

Deliberative democracy partly recalls the participatory models of democratic self-rule of ancient heritage, but there is also a more limited understanding of this model. It is mainly interested in promoting and assessing the capacity for deliberation of formal political institutions, like chambers of parliament and other representative assemblies. The versions of deliberative democracy that take their inspiration from the ideals of participatory democracy emphasize the extent to which it can be a form of democratic self-rule under the conditions of complex modern societies. In this way, there is then the prospect for the insertion of democratic deliberation into different institutional contexts. Deliberative democrats believe that the principles of deliberation are egalitarian and that these principles conflict with the predominance of strategic and instrumental considerations in modern capitalist societies. It is the intention of this model to attempt to democratically control the power of capital and bureaucratic authority by subjecting them to decision-making based on public opinion and deliberation. What distinguishes the theory and unites the proponents of deliberative democracy, in Mark Warren’s opinion, “is a common commitment to the notion that political decisions are better made through deliberation than money or power, as well as to the ideal that participation in deliberative judgements should be as equal and widespread as possible.”38

The general tenets of deliberative democracy can be finessed in quite different ways and the parameters of this model have not yet solidified. Deliberative democracy seems to imply a redefining of the relationship between the state and civil society. Like associative models, the definition of civil society is critical to determining whether civil society is as a whole a site of deliberation or a framework within which deliberative forms are realised. In
the latter case, deliberations would take place, for instance, through voluntary associations and civic forums; however, it is unlikely that these forums would of themselves be able to generate universalistic agreement. In response to similar conceptual problems, Nancy Fraser distinguishes between strong and weak public spheres, while Habermas draws a somewhat analogous distinction between the core and peripheral institutions of deliberative politics. Similarly, the replication within deliberative models of the dispute between representative and participatory conceptions of democracy has been mentioned. These established debates can be extended to the contrast between limiting deliberation (as Seyla Benhabib does) to a principle of determining political legitimacy, and extending its application to all contexts of social organization. At the core of most deliberative models are procedural criteria, such as equal opportunity for participation in discussions and the rational assessment of different claims. These criteria can be more or less stringent. In most cases the intention of defining procedures is to show that the satisfaction of deliberative conditions entails more exacting standards of legitimation than those already instituted.

However, the internal disputes over the constitution of deliberative democracy may be less consequential for this model than the implications of its external conditioning. It is worthwhile reviewing this model in light of the new social conflicts that are situated between globalization and democracy, like those ensuing from the contrast between the mobility of capital and the lesser mobility of people or labour. One could even seek to differentiate liberal from social democratic versions of deliberative democracy in terms of a comparison of their protection of ‘institutional capital’ and that of their reinforcement of social protection tied to the state. Similarly, deliberative models of democracy tend to be connected to arguments about the significance of postmaterial values and the critique of structures of authority, but it can be argued that the globalization processes that weakened class solidarity have been a catalyst for regressive nationalism and religious fundamentalism. At the same time, there is a growing body of ‘anti-capitalist’ popular literature which could alternatively promote the perception of a regeneration of class-based conflicts in response to the neo-liberal program of globalization. Theorists of deliberative democracy tend to emphasize the value of consensus—yet, even if globalization does not exacerbate conflicts, it may generate problems that are unlikely to be amenable to consensual resolution. That is, the lack of resolution may simply be a product of the disparity between conditions of the genesis of consensus and the (probably unintended) consequences of decisions in a very different global context. Similarly, the associative model of democracy has been criticized for its potential neo-corporatism; in my opinion, it would not be totally unreasonable to surmise that globalizing processes could promote the corporatizing of associations. On the other hand, a cosmopolitan interpretation of deliberative democracy suggests a more optimistic scenario than those sketched above. For cosmopolitans, the simple juxtaposing of globalization and democracy loses sight of the connection human rights have to democracy and the fact that the emergence of a ‘global order’ is partly constituted by a transnational civil society.

The cosmopolitan position finds support in the generalization of democracy as the precondition of legitimation and this development has, in turn, promoted the proliferation of democratic models. Indeed, the deliberative model has generated a further reflective
model of democracy, as well as the ‘countermodel’ of agonistic democracy. It is somewhat ironic then that the current models of democracy are limited in their ability to explain this proliferation. The most plausible account would be one that is able to discern the grounding of deliberative processes of communication in a democratic culture. Habermas’ thesis of the communicative rationalization of the lifeworld underpins his discourse theory of democracy and satisfies these desiderata to the extent at least that democratization consists in the instantiation of the normative principles underlying the achievement of mutual understanding. The thesis depicts an expansion of democracy that is continuous with the communicative processes of transmitting culture, legitimating institutions and shaping personalities according to the practices of validating arguments. Yet, the current proliferation of democratic models highlights democratic invention and the importance of social creativity. In fact, Habermas’ deliberative model of democracy appeals to creativity at many levels, from the ‘context-transcending’ claims of everyday communicative action to the projection involved in the ‘communication community’s’ envisaging the effective realization of constitutional principles. Even so, this model significantly limits the potential consequences of democratic creativity—it does so by privileging the procedural conditions of legitimacy, the channelling required so that communicative power can be translated into legal-administrative power and, most consequentially, by the often unwarranted acceptance of functionalist or ‘systems theoretical’ considerations as grounds for curtailing democratization. Contemporary French theorists of democratic creativity have explicitly criticised Habermas’ version of deliberative democracy on related grounds. For instance, Castoriadis claims that Habermas’ model confuses democracy with procedures and disguises the real question of its institution as a regime, whilst Rancière considers that the apparent continuity between democratic discourse and consensus represents a denial of politics—a denial based upon the misrepresentation of the actual character of disagreement.

The two most important attempts to transform, whilst nonetheless building on, the legacy of Habermas’ reconstruction of critical theory have turned to the notions of creative democracy in North American pragmatist philosophy. In the case of both Honneth’s theory of ‘the struggle for recognition’ and Joas’ explications of the ‘creativity of action’ and the ‘genesis of values’, the conceptualization of creative democracy is only at preliminary stages, remaining substantially indebted to the ideas of Mead and Dewey. The appeal of creative democracy equally resides in the constructive response it would engender to the dilemmas of globalization. In a sense, the opening up of a ‘way of life’ and the cultural expansion of democratic horizons is precisely what Dewey’s category of creative democracy is meant to signify. For Dewey, “democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness.” Extending social connections is therefore an intrinsic feature of democracy, but democracy is distinct from other ways of organising experience; it does not subject experience to “external control, to some ‘authority’ alleged to exist outside the process of experience.” Dewey’s pragmatist understanding of experience emphasises how creative learning emerges in response to problems and challenges that disrupt existing forms of doing and understanding. Creative democracy entails a continuous redefinition of parameters, as extension and enrichment
are requirements of its practice. But democracy cannot be actualized unless it is already grounded in the practical experience of social cooperation and the shared exchange of communication.49

It is common to locate the pragmatist understanding of democracy among the liberal developmental models, however this entails that creativity is identified with its preconditions rather than potentiality.50 Dewey contends that experience has the capacity to surpass its conditions through internally generated learning and the interactions that consolidate new perspectives. For Dewey, creative democracy signifies a social capacity for democratic reinvention and a self-governing and self-realizing orientation to the world. The breadth of this model is evident in Talisse’s definition of ‘Deweyan democracy’ as “a style of substantive democratic theory which emphasizes citizens’ participation in the shared cooperative undertaking of self-government at all levels of social association.”51 He believes that it intersects in a number of respects with civic republican notions of democracy.52 Similarly, the recent French literature on the theme of democratic creativity suggests that equating creative democracy with liberal developmental ideals overlooks its substantial questioning of this model and potential future processes of democratization. Whilst several of these recent French theories have their origins in the tradition of civic republicanism and its conception of democracy as embodied in the unity of a sovereign general will, the category of democratic creativity is associated with a welter of attempts to elucidate the processes of instantiating democratizing tendencies and distinctive appreciations of the symbolic horizon of politics. They include Castoriadis’ discussions of the imaginary of the project of autonomy, Lefort’s notion that the site of power remains unoccupied, Touraine’s conception of the historicity of social movements, Rancière’s association of democracy with the political demand for radical equality, and Gauchet’s assessment of the innovative character of the liberal disenchantment of the world.53 Despite the diversity and indefinite character of many of these positions, they undoubtedly involve new means and criteria for addressing long-standing questions concerning democracy. In particular, they imply that the contemporary conundrum of the discrepancy between the almost universal acceptance of the normative ideals of democracy and their limited realization needs to be reconsidered in light of the tendencies of regimes to conceal the conditions of their institution and the social capacity of creativity to exceed these conditions. The concern of French theories of democratic creativity with the initiating of symbolic horizons that question the legitimacy of interpretative frameworks probably points towards a more agonistic conception of the politics of democratization.

The horizon of democratization is shaped by the perception of the parameters of a democratic model. As a consequence, the challenges that globalization allegedly poses to national sovereignty have contributed to demands for new democratic models. These demands have emerged in the context of recent appreciations of the importance of indeterminacy to autonomy and attempts to explicate how the political is realized in the symbolic representation and interpretation of the social order. In all cases, these frameworks of discussion precipitate moves beyond the paradigmatic model of liberal democracy and its variants. This questioning of liberal democracy is critical, as the stabilization of its form and the current universalization of its institution could conceal the limited social grounding of democracy. For this reason,
it has been argued that the potential for democratization is a critical determinate of the legitimacy of a model of democracy and that it is necessary to recognize how this horizon of democratization can be mobilized to instantiate shifts and changes in democracy. In different ways, the current deliberative and associative democratic models have sought to give expression to this appreciation. They have emerged in response to perceptions of the limitations of traditional social democracy. The pragmatist inspired model of creative democracy incorporates the central dimensions of the associative and deliberative conceptions, but its specific concern with the altering of the parameters of democracy is likely to provide greater insights into the globalisation of experience and contemporary social change. Despite the undoubted suggestiveness of the normative ideals of pragmatist notions of experience and intelligence, the precise meaning of the notion of creative democracy has yet to fully crystallise. For Dewey, creative democracy is ultimately an orientation that is acquired through the experience of participating in a democratic ‘way of life’s’ structure of cooperation and open communication. Whether this understanding can be reconciled with the emphasis of recent French theories of democratic creativity on rupture and conflict may be significant for future interpretations of the connection between the practices of democratization and the regime of democracy.

Craig Browne
University of Sydney

Notes

2. Lefort, Democracy and Political Theory 3.
5. Lefort, Democracy and Political Theory 11.
34. Giddens, Beyond Left and Right 35.
42. Jürgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 1 Reason and the Rationalisation of Society, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) “The concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensusbringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality or rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.” 10
43. Jürgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms.
47. Dewey, The Political Writings 244.
50. Held, Models of Democracy
52. In Talisse’s opinion, ‘Deweyan democracy’ intersects with civic republicanism in five respects: (1) both ‘reject liberal individualism and accept a thoroughly social view of the self’, (2) democracy is considered a substantive moral ideal (applicable to personal character and all areas of life conduct), (3) as a consequence, democracy is not limited to a set of formal structures and institutional arrangements, (4) so, rather than just a system of majority rule, it is primarily ‘a mode of associated living’, (5) one that is morally formative and oriented to the common good, a democratic community is participatory and democracy is an ‘end-in-itself’; it is not in the service of some higher ideal. Talisse, “Can Democracy be a Way of Life? Deweyan Democracy and the Problem of Pluralism.”

Copyright © 2006 Craig Browne, Contretemps. All rights reserved.