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**From Moral to *Metical*:
Democratic Theory and the Concept of Ethos**

Sofia Chatzisavvidou

Submitted to the Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Swansea University

2012

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Abstract

The thesis is located within the context of the democratic tradition of political theory, exploring its various articulations of 'ethos' since antiquity. The argument is that a conception of ethos sustains and infuses visions of democracy and mobilises individuals politically; it is omnipresent within democratic thinking and experience and therefore it requires the attention of political theorists. However, there is a failure, the thesis argues, to grasp ethos in the fluid and open way that best corresponds to the multifarious nature of democracy. The purpose of the thesis, then, is to fill in this gap in democratic theory.

In so doing, the thesis explores the persistent connection between ethos and morality in contemporary democratic thought and argues that this connection poses limitations on our understanding of democracy and our ability to act democratically. To sustain the argument pursued here, the thesis attends to democracy as a multiplicity with different variegations and discernible intensities and therefore as an ongoing process of creating, grasping and capitalising on possibilities for action in conditions of fluidity, plurality and ambiguity. Democracy entails a constant call for awareness of the specificity of the circumstances and for receptivity to the possibilities for interference they carry.

An ethos suitable to such a democratic vision is one that responds to the peculiarities of the occasion. The thesis envisions a democratic ethos that is not merely conceived in terms of a repertoire of dispositions but rather is infused by the mental virtue of *metis*. It is this latter that enables us to respond to democracy's call for action and to affirm democratic ethos as a combination of sensibilities and the competency to seize the moment and exploit it in our favour on the terrain of the democratic *agon*. A democratic ethos is our dwelling in the moment of democratic action and therefore a dwelling temporally.



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STATEMENT 1

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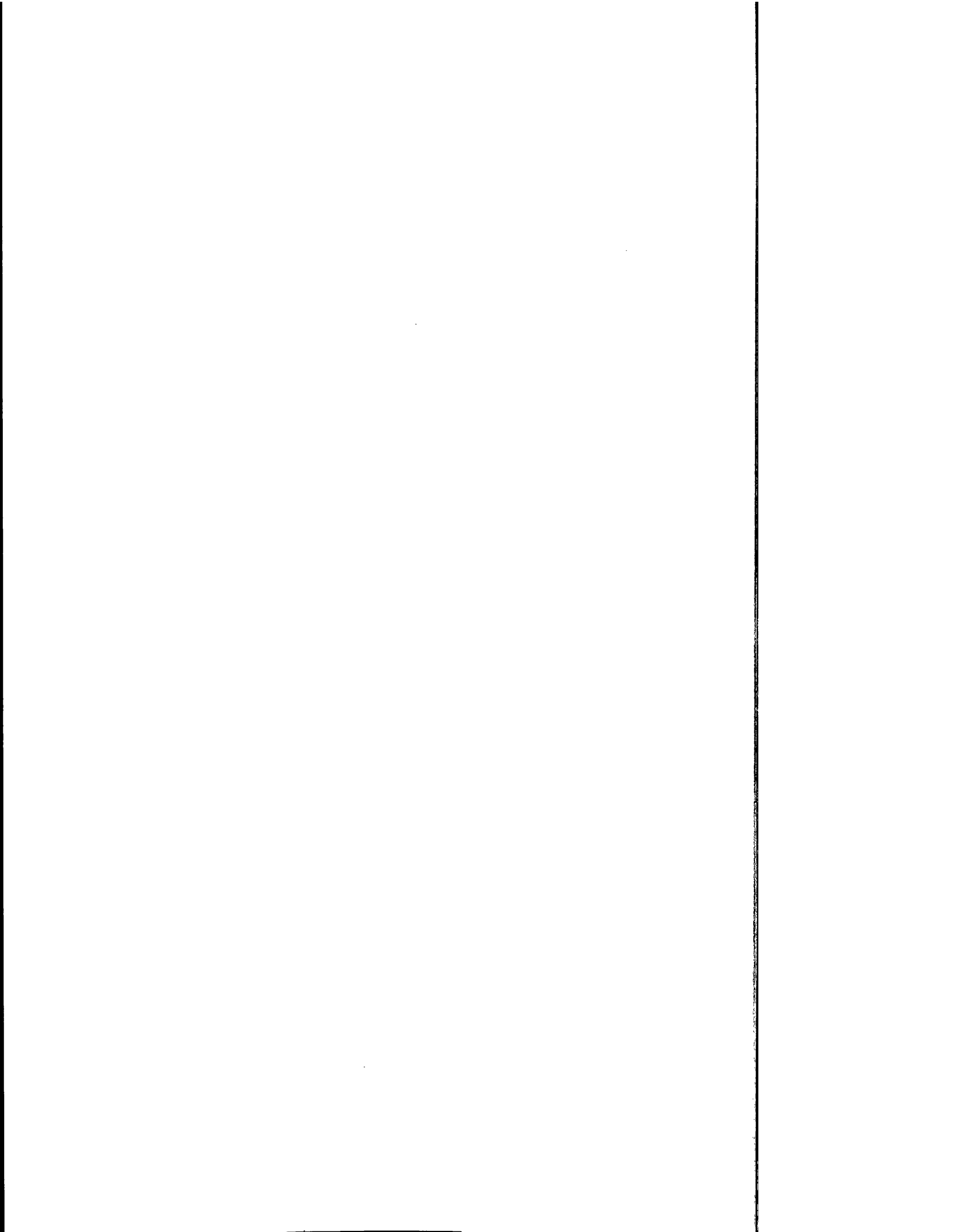
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Introduction

The thesis is located within the context of the democratic tradition of political theory, exploring its various articulations of 'ethos' since antiquity. The argument is that a conception of ethos sustains and infuses visions of democracy and mobilises individuals politically; it is omnipresent within democratic thinking and experience and therefore it requires the attention of political theorists. However, while the fruits of the articulation of democracy and ethos are available to us today, there is a failure, the thesis argues, to grasp ethos in the fluid and open way that best corresponds to the multifarious nature of democracy.

More specifically, the thesis argues that democracy is inherently paradoxical and agonistic: the conditions that enable it are its very threats. In the thesis democracy is perceived as a multiplicity with different variegations and discernible intensities: a kaleidoscopic variation of the political that reformulates and is reformulated continuously. Democracy is itself an *agon* that takes place within and across the boundaries of established norms which, often, it seeks to transform. It is inherently agonistic because it is an ongoing process of creating, grasping and capitalising on possibilities for action in conditions of fluidity, plurality and ambiguity. Thus understood, democracy entails a constant call for awareness of the specificity of the circumstances and for receptivity to the possibilities for interference they carry.

An ethos suitable to such a democratic vision is one that is not prefixed and stable but, rather, one that responds to the peculiarities of the occasion. The intellectual category of *metis* (which I draw out from its pre-Socratic sources) proves important to the specificity of the moment of political enactment, that is to the momentary dimension of democracy. The thesis envisions a democratic ethos that is not merely conceived in terms of a repertoire of dispositions but rather is infused by the intellectual virtue of *metis*. It is this latter that enables us to respond to democracy's call for action and to affirm democratic ethos as a combination of sensibilities with the competency to seize the moment and exploit it in our favour on the agonistic

terrain. A democratic ethos is our dwelling in the moment of democratic action and therefore a dwelling temporally.

I. The Problematic of Democracy

Democracy is in fashion. It is the form of government preferred and promoted by powerful international agents such as the European Union, the government of The United States of America and the World Bank and a term which seems ever-present in political campaigns, discussions in conference panels and academic journals. The fall of the wall in Berlin in 1989 seemingly signaled the victory of democracy over other forms of governance, and its emergence as the indisputable political value, the only trustworthy and successful mode of political organisation. A new right was then born - the right to democratic governance.¹ The terms “democratic transition” and “democratic consolidation” were dynamically re-introduced onto the political agenda to emphasise the need to establish democracy where previously it had been absent, and to name the process of guiding these societies to the political glade that only democracy provides. In the spirit of absolute predominance, great political actions have been undertaken in the name of “Democracy”, interventions into places considered as “problematic” or “unstable” - the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, the academic cycles produce new journals that thematise democracy, and new books and articles on the topic, indicate the growing academic interest²: “We are all democrats now”.

In both political and academic discourse democracy is connected to ideals such as freedom, equality and justice, which, despite their meaning shifting and changing over time, attribute to democracy an absolutely positive status

¹ Roland Axtmann, *Democracy: Problems and Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 95. The Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union adopted a Universal Declaration on Democracy in 1997, recognising democracy as “an ideal and mode of deal to be pursued and a mode of government to be applied according to modalities which reflect the diversity of experiences and cultural particularities without derogating from internationally recognised principles, norms and standards” (First Part, Article 2).

² See for example the new *Journal of Democracy* (1990), as well as *Constellations- An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* (1994), and the less influential *Democratization* (1994).

and demands that everyone confess their commitment to it. The political task is thus rendered as nothing other than to promote, protect, strengthen or sustain democracy. Anthony Giddens has even suggested that democracy needs to be “democratised”.³ This catholic appeal of democracy has resulted in the concept becoming overloaded and the plethora of words and deeds associated with it has brought not to clarification, but obscurantism and fragmentation. As Wendy Brown has put it, “in practice, democracy has never been more conceptually footloose, substantively thin, or semiotically manipulated for undemocratic domestic and foreign exploits”.⁴ The conceptual frameworks in the context of which democracy arises vary significantly, involving different aspects and raising different issues, while the term itself remains an essentially contested concept.⁵ Seemingly infinitely adjustable to the intended results of policies, speeches and deeds, democracy is each time filled in with a different meaning, articulated with varying terms. Yet, still, it is increasingly conceptualised as a homogenous system of institutions and practices. In some cases democracy is discussed as something already given, whereas in others it is the ultimate target but in both cases it is identified with a political system which satisfies the principles of equality and freedom for all its citizens, who are entitled through universal suffrage to elect, in multiparty elections, a constitutional government with executive power under control of an independent juridical mechanism.

It is usually assumed that institutions are a prerequisite of a long-standing political regime that not only respects individual freedoms and promotes justice, but also is home of a *demos*, not least because “rules frame behaviour”.⁶ Political developments in Eastern Europe have pushed things further in the direction of conceptualising democracy in terms of a narrow and limiting set of institutional rules and procedures that more frequently than not need to be imposed. At the same time, these very developments and the

³ Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

⁴ Wendy Brown, “Editor’s introduction” *Theory and Event* 13, no. 2 (2010), lines 4-6.

⁵ The term was used by W.B.Gallie to describe concepts that cause dispute about their proper use by part of their users and was further elaborated by William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 10-44.

⁶ Jan- Erik Lane and Svante Ersson, *Democracy: A Comparative Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 125.

need to fill the institutional gap created in the countries of the region by the collapse of the Communist regimes brought to the fore discussions over economic issues: the process of democratisation is now inextricably connected to economic liberalisation. In this context, the European Union officiated at the process of designing and implementing specific policies and projects aiming to establish democratic regimes in Eastern Europe, by exchanging the status of membership for compliance with specific political and economic conditions set by the bureaucratic institutions of the EU.⁷ Thus, social and economic development have directly been connected to democratisation. The doctrine of *laissez faire* or a free market economy is now elevated to a strong pillar of liberal democratic regimes; the classical neoliberal views of Hayek and Nozick advocating the minimalisation of the state (Nozick) and the restriction of democracy to its legislative form (Hayek), gain ground and become central.⁸ Democracy and market rules are considered as highly interrelated and interacted, but this has not been for the benefit of democracy.

Instead of being enriched by the multilateral interest, attention and trust it has attracted, democracy has depreciated into a mere form of administration. Despite its celebration after 1989, democracy today tends to appear as an empty symbol of Western culture, one full of pictures, synonyms and examples but still empty of meaning. Hence the paradoxical phenomenon of the accumulation of discourses on democracy and the simultaneous public disaffection with it, both in popular and political discourse. More specifically, democracy runs the gauntlet of various groups, such as neoconservatives, the New Right, or religious circles, according to which the problem is exactly that “too much democracy” prevails today in the world.

According to these critics, democracy is to be blamed for limitlessness, that is for an inability to resist the loss of particularity and damage to national interests as well as for institutional inefficiency in tackling these issues. More

⁷ Between 1989 and 2003 the EU implemented three major programmes, Phare, ISPA and Sapard, providing €3 billion a year, to help candidate countries in their pre-accession route towards membership. Building institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human rights is one of the basic criteria a country needs to satisfy in order to access the EU.

⁸ Friedrich August Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (New York: Routledge, 2001 (1944)), Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974). See also Steven Fish, “Stronger legislatures, stronger democracies” *Journal of Democracy* 17, no.1 (2000), 5-20.

often than not, democracy is also presented as corrupted by democratic society, succumbing to claims of varied groups of individuals in the name of equality and respect for difference, failing thus to ensure its own survival.⁹ Pertinent examples include the headscarf issue in France, the dialogue over “illegal” immigrants in the European Union and the debate over removal of religious signs from school classes in Greece. In each case, democracy is depicted as a pure type of order, framed by a pre-given and non-challengeable set of values and ways of political and social life. The plurality of ethical sources manifested in democratic societies results in the fragmentation of the public sphere, the devaluation of the common — national, cultural or divine — and therefore threatens democracy itself. According to this argument, more attentiveness to unitary forms of collective expression is required and the looseness of democracy takes us in the wrong direction.

There is, then, a threefold paradox regarding democracy today: first of all, there is an excess of democracy, at least as far as the use of the term itself is concerned, for it is articulated and claimed to be of high value by too many people in too many places and occasions; second, and despite the first factor, it is under-theorised, tending to be treated as synonymous with an institutional arrangement that secures a standard of development and prosperity; and third, it has become the scapegoat of the far and wide anti-democrats who make the case against it, sometimes in the name of cultural diversity and sometimes in the name of national interest. This threefold ambiguity indicates a problem inherent in democratic discourse, a problem with regard to the dichotomised way democracy is conceptualised. What is implied here is that democracy is connected to values and principles considered of the highest worth, whereas at the same time its functioning relies upon procedures, practices and institutions that are continuously scrutinised and pronounced inefficacious.

This thesis attends to this ambiguity and connects it to the content attributed to democracy by those engaged in the endeavour of theorising it. Not only does democracy need to be reconceptualised in terms that are more

⁹ Here I follow the line of thought drawn by Jacques Rancière as explicated in his *Hatred on Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006), which discusses and analyses the issue.

affirmative of its multifarious and kaleidoscopic nature; our mode of engaging theoretically with it also needs to be reformulated so that we resist the use of neat elaborated categories and disturb those binaries that appear to inhabit our political thinking. In order to do so, one does not need to renounce institutions, norms and principles that shape and organise political life; one only needs to become also attentive to non-institutional aspects of democratic being and thus to the ethotic dimension of democracy.

II. Theorising Democracy, Theorising Ethos: A Knotty Relation

In an article entitled “Democracy’s lack”, the American political theorist Wendy Brown thematises democracy’s constitutive ambiguity, that is the fact that it allows space for the flourishing of multiple diverse common goods while at the same time lacks a principle of its own to which every member of a democratic society could attach themselves. She holds that this lack of democracy means that if democracy cannot bind a political society without reaching outside of itself, then there will always be some element of non-democracy, and possibly even anti-democracy, within democracy. Brown finds that the task of democrats, then, is to work this tension so that they can “generate a political culture that supplements democratic aims in ways that these aims cannot themselves provide”. She concludes her analysis with a question: “What ground for hope is there that new ways of addressing democracy’s ‘lack’ might today transpire in a collective democratic spirit, with collective democratic ambitions?”¹⁰ At the core of this thesis lies the assumption that if the lack that Brown identifies is to be filled in, then this would take the shape of an ethos that would necessarily be momentary and experiential. Neither exclusively individual nor collective, such an ethos would rather oscillate between these two poles, being the product of cultivation and work on the self but also of spontaneity; it would be infused with a mental category, that of *metis*, which would allow it to be responsive to the challenges of the democratic agonistic moment.

¹⁰ Wendy Brown, “Democracy’s lack” *Public Culture* 10, no 2 (1998), 429.

The task undertaken in this thesis is to make the case for democracy as a form of ethic, that is dispositions and sensibilities, rather than a set of institutions. There are good reasons to attend to the ethotic and experiential dimension of democracy. Although normative principles are necessary to safeguard the existence of democracy, democracy is irreducible to them and these too need to be infused by a sense of democratic attitude, disposition or behaviour. That is, rather than democracy be governed by its norms, those norms are contained within an ethos of democracy. Were it not for the individuals who will engage with them, these rules, norms and procedures would remain void of any capability to produce outcomes. Far from being a mere set of rules for the election of governments and the administration of states, democracy is a complex and rich experience and ethos is what makes this experience accessible to us. Institutions, rules and procedures form the body of democracy; ethos is the blood that makes this body work and move. However, were an ethos to be democratic, it needs to be affirmed not as a set of rules one needs to follow but instead as acting within and upon the political moment. The thesis explores how the tradition of democratic theory, while transcending the idea of ethos as personal credibility, fails to envision ethos as something else than a set of rules of behaviour.

Attentiveness to ethos in late modernity is frequently discussed as being part of a distinct moment in political thought, a so called ethical turn, an awareness of ethical issues understood as indispensable to political life. This is a diverse rather than concrete approach to the tension between ethics and politics and different thinkers attend to it from diverse viewpoints. For some thinkers our ethical orientations define and dictate our political stances, actions and decisions. Consequently, the latter are subject to judgment with regard to their validity according to moral values and codes. In this case, ethos is a distinct moral code, a particular way of life which corresponds to the particular form of government that democracy represents. George Kateb, for example, attributes to representative democracy a 'moral distinctiveness'.¹¹ He contends that modern democracy is characterised by a certain feeling or sentiment, that of individuality, and that citizens of modern

¹¹ George Kateb, "The moral distinctiveness of representative democracy" *Ethics* 9, no. 3 (1981), 357-374.

democratic societies need to cultivate an ethos of democratic aestheticism that is unavoidably morally driven and intensively adherent to morality.¹² Ethos thus conceived does not deviate from the traditional conception of a standard to judge political behaviour and democracy becomes a moral category.

Other theorists are critical of this arguing that conceiving of modern democratic societies as organic wholes infused by a certain disposition (rather than as dynamic complexities with diverse moral sources and commitments) entails the moralisation of the field of politics, a tendency that needs to be resisted because of its hostility towards pluralism. These critical theorists affirm pluralism as democracy's integral part, one that not only needs to be preserved but indeed enhanced. They also contend that the formation of ethos is a political practice itself and they pay tribute to techniques of sensibility formation such as micropolitics or work on the self, which honour the affective dimension of political action. Rather than morality, that is, sets of rules, values and codes that are recommended to individuals through established institutions, it is sensibilities and dispositions that participate in the creation and reproduction of political principles. Jane Bennett, for example, works on the impact that the formation of an ecological or greener sensibility can have towards a vital materialist theory of democracy, one that sheds light on the ambiguity of the tension between ethics and politics.¹³ Approaches of this kind affirm ethos as a field that can be politicised rather than as a pre-political category and therefore are of especial relevance to the task undertaken in this thesis - to offer a vision of ethos that is relevant to democracy and most specifically to the peculiarities of the democratic moment. However, as I will argue, this perspective needs further elaboration and enrichment.

¹² George Kateb, "Aestheticism and morality: Their cooperation and hostility" *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (2000), 34.

¹³ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

III. Untying the Knot

The thesis attends to the knotty relation between democracy and ethos by way of comprehending the former as an action and the latter in its existential and momentary dimension, that is as an ethic, as a multiplicity of dispositions one shows in the occasion of the democratic moment and therefore an ethic that is pertinent to it. Such a conception of ethos entails four claims:

- first, that democracy is an *agon*, that is a field of contestation and resistance and at the same time of plurality and diversification;
- second, that ethos is reducible neither to its collective nor to its individual component, but, rather, oscillates between the two;
- third, that ethos is always specific to an occasion, a particular moment of action;
- fourth, ethos is informed by a mental category, that of *metis*.

To attend to democracy as an *agon* is to honour difference rather than identity, fluidity rather than fixity and dissensus rather than consensus. It is to disturb the confinement of democracy to established norms and to seek to rework rather than renounce what appears to be already settled and neatly defined. It is also to politicise questions of ethics, rather than seeking to marginalise them for the fear of being too partial, while at the same time resisting the tendency to draw the profile of the “ideal democrat”. As it is suggested in the thesis, the discussion of ethos in a political context from antiquity to late modernity reveals that ethos is better affirmed as an interplay between the collective and the individual: it is never reduced to either of these two components. Agonistic approaches to democracy draw our attention to this interplay not least because they allow space for perceiving the field of the democratic *agon* as one bursting with shifting challenges. The thesis discusses a variety of such approaches and explores ways in which agonistic theorists have explicitly touched on ethos and argued for the importance it plays in the ways we engage with democracy.

The reading of agonistic approaches enables me to extract fruitful ideas on the kind of action and experience that democracy might be and the role

that ethos has in perceptions of democracy that affirm its experiential dimension. At the same time, this very reading establishes an absence at the heart of these agonistic views: a failure fully to conceive of ethos. Agonistic approaches too often overlook the fluidity that characterises an ethos defined as democratic and under-theorise the responsiveness of ethos towards the particularity of the political circumstances within, and in reference to which, it arises. The thesis, then, defines a democratic ethos as is one that corresponds to the specificity of the moment and the peculiarities it carries and to which one must synchronise. I argue that if this is to be achieved and in order to exploit the democratic moment, its challenges and opportunities, a democratic ethos needs to be infused by *metis*.

The main argument of the thesis is, then, that an intellectual virtue like *metis* proves important when working on/with the idea of a democratic ethos. The thesis does not seek to refute the argument made by those theorists who insist on the role of cultivating specific ethical dispositions, such as receptive generosity or forbearance; rather, it discusses some of the shortcomings of such elaborations in order to suggest that these can be overcome if we envision democracy as *agon* in its momentary and experiential dimension and a democratic ethos as one that is also supported by an intellectual category, a virtue or craft which belongs to the sphere of the intellect.

Underlying this suggestion is the assumption that ethical questions are embedded in our thinking and that therefore they are unavoidable in our political representations and negotiations. Nevertheless this does not entail that ethical issues are already political issues; rather, they can be politicised when, for example, we grasp them as defining the ways we place ourselves towards others and the different identities they carry. In the same pattern, even the formation of ethical sensibilities is a potentially political practice which involves affective, corporeal as well as intellectual dimensions. However, in contrast to deliberative theories which tend to elevate reason and reasoning to the ultimate source of our ethico-political decisions, the approach towards ethics followed here affirms thinking as only participating in such decisions, along with visceral and somatic functions. Therefore, while it recognises the impact of thinking on ethico-political commitments, at the

same time it insists on the constitutive insufficiency of such intellectualism to ethics.¹⁴

Metis or cunning intelligence is a Greek term for the mental category that is relevant in terms of time and place. Originally it means a multifarious way of knowing, whereas it also is the name of a deity that embodies the ability of continuous metamorphoses, the wife of Zeus and mother of Athena. It implies a complex but coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour and it is applied to transient and shifting situations, in which exact calculation or rigorous logic are expected to be insufficient.¹⁵ *Metis* operates by oscillating between the two mutually exclusive spheres of reality, that is being, which represents the unchanging, the limited, and becoming, which is related to the unstable and multiple; hence its relevance to the changing reality.¹⁶

I find that *metis* corresponds to the agonistic and kaleidoscopic vision of democracy embraced here, and to its demand for the formation of creative responses to the challenges and pressures posed for democracy in late modernity. The relevance of *metis* lies in that it is a multiplicity: it is already plural in itself, for it does not represent any specific virtue but the multi-dimensional ability to adapt to *kairos*, that is to the circumstances, to calculate them and to take the form most appropriate in order to exploit them, to make them favourable. In the field of the democratic *agon*, *metis* enables one to approach an adversary in a way that is irreducible, even antithetical to violence but still provides a weapon with which to confront her. The individual that exhibits or displays *metis* brings to the agonistic terrain “the most manifold art of style any man has ever had at his disposal”;¹⁷ she carries the possibility of many different abilities, virtues, dispositions, in other words *ethea*, and she makes use of the most pertinent of them to act in and on the specificity of the fugitive occasion. She can then form coalitions that are

¹⁴ William Connolly makes this claim in his work *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 111.

¹⁵ Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press Limited, 1978), 3-4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1979), 44.

fleeting and thus honour the tensions between diverse constituents of the democratic game. The thesis argues, then, that the fluidity that characterises a democratic ethos which is informed by *metis*, is its virtue and vice, for whereas it enables the generation of responses that are context specific and the opening of further challenges, it remains open to different elaborations and formulations; it is fragile and susceptible to the forces it seeks to confront.

IV. Terminological Clarifications and Methodological Approaches

A central claim in the thesis is that ethos does not necessarily pertain to morality: the latter is too fixed and established and for that reason it is insufficient for ethics, which also requires an embodied sensibility that generates the impetus to enact moral codes.¹⁸ Ethos is here conceived in the broader sense of an ethical disposition that exceeds moral principles and norms and involves diverse sensibilities formulated and engendered in different occasions.

In a certain sense, “the issue of ethos is unavoidable”:¹⁹ ethos is already embedded in theories, practices, institutions. But this claim alone can pose serious political questions, since it may well pertain to totalitarian ways of organising a political society. George Orwell’s dystopia in *1984* can be said to be organised and function with a certain ethos, one that is under continuous reworking and reimposition by the powers of Big Brother. This is why, if one is to offer a theorisation of a *democratic* ethos, she needs to define what it is that renders it democratic in a specific and profound manner.

Such an argument is offered in the thesis by way of affirming democratic ethos as suggesting not habituation but departure and detachment from one’s accustomed circumstances. This behaviour or comportment is dictated by the late modern condition, one characterised by the overwhelming mobility

¹⁸ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 131.

¹⁹ William E. Connolly, “The power of assemblages and the fragility of things” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10, no. 2 (2008), 246.

of bodies and ideas, the rapid transformation of the environments - natural, urban, social, political, economic - individuals find themselves in, the evolution of new modes of political engagement and the emergence of new constituents which are frequently the result of the previous developments. Late modern democrats, then, need to be flexible and adaptable to the challenges posed to them by the chain of events that affect and even threaten their existence. It is in these terms that a democratic ethos is inextricably connected to our responses to grievances or other challenges of late-modern political life, our participation in and performances of political actions, our reactions toward diverse encounters that fugitively join others in honouring different moral sources, values and public goods. A democratic ethos cannot be reduced to an individualised ethic, however, for its creation, production and reformulation happen always in the context of practices that take place in spaces and times already shared with others. Therefore, a democratic ethos is one that oscillates between two poles, the individual and the collective, and it is the interplay between those which renders it its democratic character.

In order to develop and sustain this argument across the thesis, a genealogical path is followed, one that aims at exposing the shifting nature of ethos, its ambiguity and its fugitiveness. That is, the thesis follows the appearances of ethos from antiquity to late modernity and discusses how the term arises in the context of political thinking, sometimes to denote a private trait that attributes special competencies to its holder and sometimes to designate a public virtue that characterises a political collective body. In examining the diverse appearances of ethos, the thesis shows that, although there appears to be a continuity in the discourse that generates the issue of ethos, and that the pattern of the interplay between the public and the private is evident in all its appearances examined here, a new element enters the discussion only in late-modernity and interrupts this sequence by creating new challenges and posing new dimensions: that of pluralism.

The path of genealogy taken here requires us to follow closely yet critically the texts selected as best representing the account of ethos pertinent to the argument. To be sure, and despite the fact that the texts are “chosen”, that is they are preferred to others for their contribution to the argument, their

“reading” attempted here is not critical in the sense of condemnation. Rather, a more generous approach is chosen, one that poses the question: “Does the text work for me? And how?”.²⁰ The purpose of selecting and using the specific texts, then, is not to interpret them or demand explanations from their writers on their “wrong” perceptions, for the purpose here is not to find a definition or ideal formulation of ethos and then move to judgments according to it. Instead, it is to scrutinise how these diverse articulations of ethos contribute to its continuous formulation in the context of democratic thought. The search for absolute criteria which can help in making secure judgements is not within the scope of the present thesis.

To resist the tendency to create criteria of judgment is to seek to rework categories that appear to be conveniently ready-cut for use in our political evaluations and decisions. Such is the case with the different binaries that reside in political theorists’ thinking for they provide neat ways of identifying with certain sides. Although the thesis accepts that we cannot get rid of dualisms altogether, it suggests that we can at least disturb them in order to allow the emergence of potentialities that can contribute towards the enrichment of our understanding of political phenomena such as democracy. Pervasive in the thesis is the attempt to rework the binary that inhabits ethos as an individual or collective trait and to take on other dichotomies such those of the ordinary/extraordinary, passivity/activity and silence/noise in order to develop an argument for a more complex approach to the modalities that help us to shape our political understanding.

V. The Structure of the Thesis

The concept of ethos is ambiguous in that too many people have talked about it but no established agreement exists on its content. This problem is elaborated in Chapter One, which scrutinises different articulations of ethos from antiquity to modernity by reading the texts of five selected thinkers. The

²⁰ This approach of “reading” is suggested by Gilles Deleuze in his “Letter to a harsh critic”, in G. Deleuze *Negotiations (1972-1990)*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 8.

analysis shows the indeterminacy of the concept of ethos, its shifting nature, but at the same time also its ubiquity to political life. The discussion opens with Foucault since it is his critical elaborations of ethical subjectivity and what he calls an aesthetics of existence that brought the issue of ethos clearly onto the stage of political thought in late modernity. Foucault is important because he shows how an ethic that is formed through personal work on the self still is a public ethic that informs and is informed by our political engagements. He opens, thus, the problematic on the oscillating nature of ethos between two poles: the individual and the collective. However, this is not a new problematic: Foucault merely enacts and re-energises it, managing to place it in the context of the contemporary political conditions. Therefore, the thesis goes back into the tradition to excavate the ethotic vision that Foucault embraces.

Although already poets in the archaic years make use of the term ethos to designate an abode, the mores of a people or the specific character of an individual, it is only with Plato that the term is explicitly put in a political context. The parallel reading of Plato's and Aristotle's work on ethos attempted in Chapter One introduces us to the interplay between the individual and the collective components of ethos, a binary that the thesis seeks to disturb. On the one hand, Plato offers a limited account of ethos, for it is a moralised one that invites individuals to adopt specific principles according to which their character, and hence also the character of the city, can be judged. On the other, Aristotle attends to both components of ethos and also introduces an infamous connection to rhetoric. However, it is argued here that his prioritisation of the community over the individual results in his envisioning an ethos which pre-exists the city, one that its citizens must embrace and accept as taken. The Aristotelian ethos cannot be a democratic one.

Nor can the Hegelian. Hegel appeals to ethos as the set of established practices that define the ethical behaviour of individuals *qua* members of a political community that bears a core of common beliefs and procedures. Individuals must conform with the principles, customs and mores inherited by them and there is no space for their creative elaboration and reformulation: ethos is pre-given and unchangeable. By contrast, Heidegger is attentive to

the dynamic and shifting nature of ethos which is better understood as a way of relating, of putting the self in relation to others. The reading attempted here specifically connects this formulation with *kairos*, that is the appropriate time for action and so suggests that with Heidegger we come closer to an understanding of ethos in its temporal and experiential dimensions.

Chapter Two locates the thesis within the discipline of political theory by addressing some aspects of the endeavour of theorising democracy. It begins by recasting the relation between theory and practice, an investigation which reveals how two disparate modes of articulating democracy have emerged, the descriptive and the normative. Unlike those working in the context of the former, thinkers who have worked in the context of the latter mode have been attentive to the connections between democracy and ethos. After discussing how they conceptualise democracy as the quest of the common bond between the members of a polity and how they fashion this bond in the form of an ethos, the chapter turns to the break that the descriptive mode of theorising introduced in democratic thought. It is suggested that what is called “contemporary democratic theory”, with its strict separation between facts and values, creates a distance between the endeavour of theorising and its subject matter, that is democracy. This leap in the tension between democracy and theory can be reformulated as the gap that exists in descriptive theories of democracy, one that is the result of the failure of the latter to attend to any idea of a common good and specifically of an ethos. It is important to reformulate not only the relation between theory and practice, but also the content of democracy itself and our ways of envisioning it, if we are not only to respond to the challenges posed for democracy today, but also to create new openings and sites for its activation.

The endeavour that is suspended by descriptive theorists of democracy, that is the connection between ethos and democracy, is enacted by normative thinkers in late modernity. Chapter Three scrutinises the tension as it has been articulated by three normative thinkers in late modernity who, in contrast to descriptive theorists, envision the idea of a common good shared by the members of political societies. To be sure, the thesis takes on the assumption that ethos is present in the work of the theorists scrutinised here; that these theorists aspire to a common good, articulated in ethical terms, in

order to sustain their visions of democracy. But whereas Rawls, Taylor and Young all find that a common good is not only attainable and desirable, but indeed indispensable to democracy, their reliance on an ethos articulated in moralised terms renders their work susceptible to criticism. For by articulating ethos as a moral code, as a set of principles that guide what is valued as ethical and thus as a means to safeguard the stability of the regime, they are obliged to depict ethos as the principle or code that should frame and even guide political life, to presuppose the singularity of the common good in democratic societies and finally to neglect the dimension that characterises late modernity: pluralism.

These shortcomings, that is to say the subordination of politics to morality and inattentiveness to pluralism as constitutive of late modern democracy, are exactly what theorists of agonism seek to resist. For them, the essence of democracy lies in the different articulations of the common good embraced by individuals, as well as in allowing these to find a place in the public terrain where they can be pursued. William Connolly, for example, whose work is scrutinised in Chapter Four, elaborates an ethico-political project that finds the cultivation of sensibilities such as 'critical responsiveness' and 'presumptive generosity' to be indispensable for democratic life. The chapter offers a complementary reading of his work along with Chantal Mouffe's, who also finds recourse to ethos to articulate her ethico-political vision. Such a reading not only reveals similarities and differences in their approaches; it also allows the envisaging of a promising image with regard to the form that a democratic ethos can have, opening the way to critically think through other aspects of the tension between democracy and ethos.

Such an aspect is advanced by the theorists scrutinised in Chapter Five. The work of Sheldon Wolin and Jacques Rancière help develop the argument defended in the thesis in that they both appreciate the temporal aspect of democracy. That is, they honour it in its fugitive and momentary dimension and they advocate the role of (in)equality in democratic enactment that takes the form of disruption. Both celebrate and theorise the importance of the fugitive moments of commonality that otherwise diverse individuals can experience. But whereas Wolin affirms the necessity of a shared civic ethic among citizens that draws them to the field of politics, calling at the same

time for a “democratisation of the self”, attending thus to both components of ethos, Rancière is suspicious of the unitary role that such an ethic might have. His failure to address the individual aspect of ethos separates his democratic vision from an important axis of political engagement.

Rancière’s cautiousness with reference to ethos alerts us to the possible destructive results that an ethic which is too instructive and directive might have for democratic life. Chapter Six thus offers a vision of how a democratic ethos is attainable without falling for a fixed ethical category that would not be responsive to the peculiarities of the democratic *agon*. To engage in a theorisation of such an ethic requires attention to the forces of creativity as discussed in Chapter Two. It also demands that we perceive democratic politics not as the eruptive moment *per se*, but as the productive tension between such multiple moments and established practices of politics. The vision embraced here is one that pertains to ethos as attuned to the circumstances of the democratic *agon*, that is to the shifting and mutating occasions of encountering an adversary, a new constituency or a new identity that needs to be addressed with agonistic respect and generosity, but at the same time to be confronted. To do so, one needs to take advantage of the peculiarities of the moment. That is, one needs to make use of some kind of intellectual virtue, of a cunning intelligence that is intermeshed with the principles of respect and generosity and will enable her to win the day. *Metis* is such a virtue and it is the central claim of the chapter that to be attuned to the moment, and hence to be able to seize it, one needs to dwell in it.

Overall the thesis shows that attentiveness to ethos not only enables a deepening of our understanding of democracy and the possible forms of its enactment in late modernity; it also allows the political theorist to perceive those very ruptures that are democracy’s most decisive moments, thus contributing to its rejuvenation and survival. A characteristic of this ethos is that it shifts and changes over time and according to circumstances. That is, it is responsive to the claims of the occasion - and it is exactly this fluidity that renders it democratic. Such a democratic ethos encompasses all the different *ethea* (in plural, ways of dwelling) that democratic citizens carry with them while moving through spaces, time and situations. However, a democratic

ethos thus defined cannot be merely reduced to their aggregate and it does not leave aside emotions, nor does it favour a rigid procedural approach to political deliberation. Rather, the democratic ethos encompasses moods, affects and corporeal reactions and allows a special place for them in the process of political communication as part of the response one reserves to the specific conditions one encounters. Thus, in this thesis, a strong claim is made that appealing to ethos does not necessarily entail adherence to a set of specific dispositions with moral resonance; rather, it pertains to a broader approach towards human conduct avoiding axiological references to highly specific or particular values, traits or qualities. Such a broader approach is vital for contemporary democratic theory and, it is hoped, this thesis is a contribution to its further clarification and development.



Chapter 1

What We Talk About When We Talk About Ethos

Attentiveness to ethos is not solely a late-modern endeavour. Nor is it a task undertaken exclusively by political theorists. Poets, rhetoricians and philosophers of the ancient and modern world have all aspired to the creation of different sorts of ethos involving different goals under diverse circumstances. Only a genealogical examination of the emergence of the concept can reveal its multifaceted and dynamic character, exposing ethos as a highly pliant notion, assigned a variety of meanings that shift and change throughout the times and places in which it has been used. However, this chapter argues that, its indeterminacy notwithstanding, ethos is not a pliable supplement to “ordinary” politics. It is, and always has been, ubiquitous to political life and to democracy specifically, since it is exactly its fluidity that makes it relevant to democracy as a multifaceted action and experience. The chapter therefore opens the discussion for the main argument of the thesis: that a democratic ethos is a disposition or sensibility that attunes us with the circumstances we find ourselves in.

The aim of the chapter, then, is to clear the landscape around ethos enabling us to see both its historical variability but also its irreducible significance for democratic thinking. This is achieved through a reading of five thinkers whose approach to ethos has marked a key turning point in the evolution of the term within political thought. My engagement with these thinkers in pairs enables me to demonstrate that thinking about ethos takes place within a web of concepts that work as binaries such as inner/outer, individual/collective and temporal/spatial. Although I do not take on the issue of binaries until Chapter Six, here I argue that this logic downplays the tactical dimension of ethos which is connected to *metis* and is re-opened in late-modernity by Foucault.

This is why the discussion opens with a consideration of Foucault’s approach to ethos: his elaborations of the concept introduce a turn to ethos as central to late-modernity, forming, indeed, the decisive point of a re-engagement with ethos. I argue that by actualising ethos in the sense of its tactical dimension Foucault not only manages to fashion an ethos of

philosophical life as a political ethos, but also poses the problem of the tension between ethos and democracy. More specifically, Foucault's views can provide us with an account of how ethical practices may function as catalysts to democracy, since they can be enacted in accordance with or in the occasion of collective democratic action. Even more importantly, Foucault's efforts to generate an aesthetics of existence show the way towards the affirmation of ethos as the mediating moment between two poles: the inner (the relation to the self), and the outer (a relationship with community). As we shall see the role of ethos in this mediation is a vital concern for democratic theory.

Foucault's recognition of the importance of the ethotic dimension derives from the fact that his genealogical excavation takes him back to antiquity. Accordingly Section II of this chapter examines the initial use of ethos by archaic poets. Here already, it appears to denote different meanings from the topological to one connected to personal character. The Chapter then continues with an attempt to localise ethos within the field of political thought. Section III turns to that tradition in order to assess how the concept and problematic of ethos evolved in the political thought of Plato and Aristotle. Reading their work in parallel I emphasise the dialectic between the two expressions of ethos in its private and public dimensions. It argues that Plato is the first to open up the problematic and to attempt to connect ethos with politics, by relating regime-types with the individual character of citizens. That is, Plato posits a reciprocal connection between the public organisation of a community and the possibility of some individuals cultivating their 'soul' in a virtuous way. However, Plato's failure to establish a satisfactory relationship between political life and political thought results in an account of ethos that is simultaneously over-moralised and apolitical. I then show how Aristotle may be read as, at least in part, responding to Plato's failure. He problematises Plato's approach to ethos as that which belongs to the individual soul, by shifting emphasis to the collective and explicitly connecting ethos to the city. In this context the chapter establishes the importance of the connection established by Aristotle between ethos and rhetoric, arguing that it is in this latter relationship that the moment of political justification is to be found.

Section IV follows the Aristotelian insistence on the collective aspect of the ethos as it is inherited in modern political thought by scrutinising how Hegel elaborates it in the development of an ethos considered suitable to modern political life. However, I argue, despite his intentions to offer an account of ethos pertinent to the peculiarities of modernity, and specifically the innovation of individual freedom, Hegel fails to offer a political account of ethos. I then turn to another theorist of modernity - Heidegger - and suggest that it is only with him that ethos is conceptualised as the combined blend of the individual and the collective. It is also with him that the moment of political justification, previously elaborated by Aristotle, is brought to the fore. Heidegger's formulations thus prove vital for the argument put forward here, for they set the foundations for a temporally delimited account of ethos.

It is by taking on this genealogy of ethos and treating its indeterminacy in the form of an oscillation between inner and the outer, the private and the public, the individual and the collective, that the task undertaken in this Chapter paves the way for a crucial aspect of the main argument of the thesis: that the democratic ethos is irreducible to either a personal ethic or to a collective virtue. It is the combination of Heidegger and Foucault that offers an account of ethos that transcends the division between the inner and the outer, and which affirms the indispensability of ethos in political life. On the one hand, Heidegger is important for his account of *kairos* which draws our attention to the tactics we need to deploy in order to respond to the opportunities offered by the moment. On the other hand, Foucault's significance lies in the way in which he helps us to see that there is something distinct about the ethos of democracy: the fact that it has a tactical dimension which is better affirmed as the interplay between the two components of ethos, the inner and outer. There is, then, a dual tactical dimension in ethos: it requires tactics on the self in order to develop and at the same time it is exposed through the tactics we perform on the proper time. It is *metis* that enables us, I suggest, to achieve this second tactical dimension of ethos.

I. Foucault: The Ethos of Philosophical Life-An Ethos for Democracy

Michael Foucault's work has contributed greatly to a "turn to ethics" not only in political thought but in late modern thought in general. In his later work especially Foucault turns to the relation to oneself, reflecting on ethics resistant to codes; ethics for him is the third axis of subjectification, the other two being power and knowledge which together constitute any matrix of experience while at the same time constraining the modern subject.¹ In doing so he introduces the concept of ethos as pertinent for descriptions of the aesthetics of existence that corresponds to the disappearance of morality as obedience to a code of rules. Here Foucault is indebted to Nietzsche not only for his negation of morality as a set of codes that dictate human conduct but also for his methodology. Foucault characterises himself as a Nietzschean, one who uses Nietzsche's texts with anti-Nietzschean theses which are nevertheless Nietzschean.² For even though he admits that his philosophical evolution has been determined by his reading of Heidegger, at the same time he recognises that it is Nietzsche who brought him to Heidegger.³ That being the case, Nietzsche's motivation to become who one is, and his insistence on the importance to "give style" to one's character, are inherent and decisive in the formulation of the Foucauldian conceptualisation of ethos. The uniqueness of the Foucauldian ethos lies in the way in which it entails the development of exercises of the self upon the self, "techniques of the self" that contribute to the aesthetics of existence. These themes are derived from the classical conception of a "care for the self" (*epimeleia heautou*).

Foucault is in agreement with his spiritual mentor, Nietzsche, who held that morality understood as a code of rules would become irrelevant to the modern world, being unable to offer the modern subject a source for

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 103.

² Michael Foucault, "The return of morality", in Lawrence Kritzman (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture; Interviews and other writings 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 251.

³ Cited in Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 113.

inspiration to answer the philosophical question: “how one is to live”.⁴ According to Foucault, a genealogy of ethics from Antiquity to Christianity reveals our passage “from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules”.⁵ But this “system of rules” lost its luster and attractiveness leaving a gap where there ought to be a source of ethical inspiration. The search for an aesthetics of existence, as he calls it, can perhaps make up for this lack. However, Foucault does not simply aspire to the substitution of a Greek Stoic ethic for Christian morality. He is well aware that the solution to a contemporary problem can never be found in a problem raised in a different era by different people.⁶ But he does believe that a certain element of Hellenic ethics, the care for the self, can acquire a meaning in the contemporary context and feed modern movements with an ethics founded not on scientific knowledge of the self, but on a *techne* of the self.

Foucault’s turn to the subject is unavoidable in the course of the evolution of his work. His critique of knowledge as liberation or emancipation and the revelation of its regulative and monitoring attributes, and his critique of the exhaustive analysis of power in its economic and juridico-political aspects, in favour of attending to its creative capacity and to the formation of new objects of knowledge, urged Foucault to turn his interest to the subject in his latter work. The modern subject, for Foucault, is a construct of domination of regimes of knowledge/power and its investigation calls on three possible domains of genealogy:

First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical

⁴ “As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness —there can be no doubt of that — morality will gradually *perish* now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe—the most terrible, most questionable, and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles”, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), Essay III 27, 161.

⁵ Michael Foucault, “An aesthetics of existence”, in Kritzman, *Michel Foucault*, 49.

⁶ Michael Foucault, “On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress”, in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 343.

ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.⁷

It is on these three axes that Foucault has deployed his work: the truth/knowledge axis was studied in *The Birth of Clinic* and *The Order of Things*, the power axis in *Discipline and Punish* and the ethical axis in *The History of Sexuality*. As he admits in his very last interview, these three domains of experience can be understood only as dependent on each other, a clue that he did not manage to grasp until his last works.⁸ Yet, according to Deleuze, the third axis was perhaps already at work with the others as evidenced by the theme which seems to haunt Foucault: interiority as the mere fold of the outside. To make it more explicit, the relation to oneself, the inner, is already at the same time a relation with others, and so an exteriority transformed into a fold inwards: to be capable of regulating oneself entails that one is capable of regulating others in the context of the family, politics, and games.⁹

Foucault problematises the relevance of morality to modernity by way of denying the idea of ethics in a certain form that requires devotion and obligation. Therefore he turns to Greek and Roman ethics, a move that allows him to approach ethics as a process of self-formation of the ethical subject and thus as “the process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice”.¹⁰ The sustenance of ethics relies on the individual itself and is attainable not through aspiration to tradition or reason, but through acts on the self. Thus ethics becomes the kind of relation one ought to have with oneself (*rappor a soi*). This presupposes a process of “cultivation of the self”, wherein the relations of oneself to oneself are intensified and valorised, a process that is dominated by the principle that one must “take care of the self”.¹¹ Such an activity “is not imposed on the individual by means of civil law or religious obligation, but is

⁷ Ibid., 351.

⁸ Michael Foucault, “The return of morality”, in Kritzman, *Michel Foucault*, 243.

⁹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 100.

¹⁰ Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 28.

¹¹ Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 43.

a choice about existence made by the individual”.¹² More specifically, it is not a single act, but a set of occupations, and for this reason it presupposes *askesis*, that is exercising practices, such as silence, listening to others and writing.¹³ The creation of the ethical subject through such practices aims not to deny or constrain the self, but rather to free it of domination; it is “an attempt to affirm one’s liberty and to give to one’s own life a certain form...”.¹⁴ Ethics is a form of care of the self and as such it is a practice of freedom, an ascetic practice that aims at self-formation.

Foucault thinks of his own philosophical practice as such a form of care, as an art of the self and he specifically highlights the value of critical thought as a way to relate oneself to modern reality, as an attitude and thus as an ethos. He suggests that a philosophical ethos which is characterised by permanent critique can actually point a way out of the condition that is already diagnosed by the philosopher, for example the impossibility of defining a source for a late modern ethic. A philosophical ethos of this kind is “one that simultaneously problematises man’s relation to the present, man’s historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject”.¹⁵ Foucault, despite identifying the Kantian approach to critique as the analysis and reflection upon limits, shifts the question from “what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing” to the very questioning of that which is given as universal and necessary, but is contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints.¹⁶ Thus, Foucault departs from Kant, developing a completely different approach to limits as historically contingent and thus subject to change. The philosophical ethos of critique that allows such an attitude towards limits is one that is archaeological in its method, in that it treats thought and words as historical events, and genealogical in its design, in that it seeks to give new impetus to the undefined work of freedom.¹⁷ That said, it is an ethos that can be characterised “as a historico-practical test of

¹² Foucault, “On the genealogy of ethics”, 361.

¹³ Ibid., 364.

¹⁴ Foucault, “An aesthetics of existence”, 49.

¹⁵ Michael Foucault, “What is enlightenment?”, in Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 42.

¹⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁷ Ibid., 46.

the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings”.¹⁸ By suggesting that we “have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative”,¹⁹ and focus instead on the limits that define us, Foucault indeed motivates the ethical subject, the outcome of work of art of one on oneself, to keep the patient *askesis* that can lead to liberty. His philosophical task of working on the limits, his philosophical ethos, is itself a way for one to become free of oneself.

The impact of Foucault’s reflections on ethics upon conceptions of ethos within political thought is profound and not least because it indicates a way of bridging the personal with the public. I find his elaborations important not least because he utilises the Nietzschean theme that morality is unable to create a necessary connection between the subject and modernity, and develops it by putting it in the context of the power/knowledge regimes structuring modern subjectivity. In doing so, Foucault introduces the idea of an ethic that is at the same time personal (it is the product of an aesthetics of existence, of an individual work on and care of the self) and includes a public dimension (for it is exemplified in an ethos that is already “in direct contact with social and political realities”).²⁰ There is a tactical dimension in ethos to which Foucault is attentive and he helps us to affirm. The Foucauldian ethos is formed as a relation to, as an attitude towards, the conditions that one finds oneself being: it is a way of placing oneself in the city or community in relationship to oneself and others.

Foucault’s work has inspired those thinkers who tend to criticise the established view that politics is inextricably connected to morality understood as a set of moral codes. These thinkers more specifically seek to give a cogent, yet non-authoritative response to questions concerning the justification of political institutions and the possible nature of the connection between individual and the state. That said, the Foucauldian approach to ethics, itself inspired by the Nietzschean account of an individual ethos formed through *askesis* apart from and above the herd, galvanised a distinct

¹⁸ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹ Ibid., 45.

²⁰ Paul Rabinow, “Introduction”, in P. Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics-Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume 1* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1997), xxii.

response to the predicament of democracy by certain thinkers, a response that places the issue of ethos in its core. Here I have in mind what is now called a tradition of post-Nietzschean democratic thinkers, that is a certain cluster of political theorists who, influenced as they are by Foucault, strive for a political theory which at the same time is also ethical.²¹ In Chapter Four I take on one of these thinkers, William Connolly, and I discuss in detail how his Nietzsche leads him to fold ethicality in his democratic vision. What is more pertinent to the purposes of the thesis, though, is Foucault's decisive contribution to the introduction of the concept of ethos in late modern political thought, a concept which as will be discussed in the following sections denounces shifting interpretations in different times and places, a fact that signifies the importance of his ethical elaborations. In order to appreciate the impact of the introduction of the concept of ethos in this specifically Foucauldian way into late-modern political thought, we need to look back on the evolution of the term and assess how it became relevant to political life and thought. For it is through such a genealogical investigation that the dynamic of the concept, as well as the centrality it has in political thought, is revealed.

The chapter now turns to the appearances of ethos from antiquity to modernity in order to bring to the surface its shifting nature and more specifically to give prominence to the Foucauldian vision of ethos as the parallel attitude towards oneself and others. It is by taking on this excavation that I will show not only how the interplay between the two dimensions - the inner and the outer - of ethos is established, but also how political thinkers otherwise attentive to ethos fail to attend to this interplay celebrated by Foucault, as well as to its tactical dimension. It is my purpose here to show how these thinkers fail to consider the notion of *metis* and the way that it is relevant to the discussion of an ethic suitable for democracy.

²¹ Thinkers that can be characterised as post-Nietzschean include Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of the Political Paradox* (Minneapolis MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2002 exp.edition); David Owen, "Nietzsche's event: Genealogy and the death of God" *Theory and Event* 6, no. 3 (2002); and Micheal J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

II. Ethos in the Tradition of Political Thought

In this section I scrutinise earlier uses of the term ethos in the context of Greek ancient poetry, not least because these appearances are complementary to our discussion of the shifting nature of the concept. Indeed, already in these early works fluctuation of the term becomes evident. As I will demonstrate ethos designates in some places something inner and elsewhere something outer: on the one hand it is used to mean the spiritual and private and on the other hand that which is connected to the action performed in public context and evaluated by others. Moreover, it is from the sphere of poetry that I extract the idea of ethos as *topos*, an idea that I revisit in Chapter Five in my discussion of Rancière's approach to ethos as abode, and an idea I refute in Chapter Six in my elaboration on ethos, where I argue that such a topological usage of ethos can only have a temporal tone. Poets in the antiquity prove also useful here for their offering an account of ethos as disposition that is multidimensional, an interpretation that again I follow in Chapter Six.

I present a genealogy of the concept of ethos in order to reveal the multiplicity and ambiguity of its usage, since the term seems to oscillate between the stable and the fluid, the personal and the public, the inner and the outer. To be sure, the term ethos (ἦθος in Greek) echoes back into the late archaic years when, at least initially, it was most commonly used in plural, as *ethea*. More specifically, it is Homer who uses it to refer to customary places of animals, such as stables and therefore to specify the places most appropriate to them in contrast to *nomes*, the pastures, which are fields of freedom.²² The Homeric *ethea* is the restricted *topoi* of safety and return for the domestic animals: ethos is synonymous with domestication. Hesiod offers a use that is most proper to humans, since with *ethea* he refers to men's abode.²³ Elsewhere he uses the term to allude to customary habits and therefore to the mores shared by specific people which are not inborn but can and indeed must be taught.²⁴ Later, in the classical

²² Homer, *Iliad*, Book VI, 511 and Book XV, 268; *Odyssey*, Book , XIV, 411.

²³ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 167-8, 222, 524-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 137, 699; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 66.

age, the historian Herodotus uses the term in order to refer to the haunt or abode of the (Persian) army but also to the manners of life, the customs or social practices that are common to Hellenes (ἠθεα τα ὁμοτροπα).²⁵ In these early references, the *ethea* is the dwelling place, the accustomed abode, but also the set of religious habits common to a people and thus the predictable and normal.

A dramatic shift in the usage of the term is designated by the appearance of the singular form of the word in the poetry of Hesiod and Theognis. Hesiod uses the term *ethos* to refer to the specific disposition that Hermes gives to Pandora and, indeed, it is her more characteristic personal attribute: it is a deceitful disposition (επικλοπον ἠθος). Theognis also adopts the singular form to denote the thievish disposition hidden in all men and that can be revealed over time.²⁶ Elsewhere, he refers to *ethos* with the adjective multifaceted, variegated (ποικιλον), to denote that it is subject to alterations and modifications according to the circumstances.²⁷ For Theognis, then, *ethos* is synonymous with the most inner characteristic of a human that, however, may reveal itself on the proper occasion or be observed by the attentive spectator.²⁸ It is man's distinctive manner that is adjustable and therefore ephemeral and observable. Already in the beginning, the concept of *ethos* oscillates between two different poles: the place of life, where one dwells, and so the outer pole, and the way of life, how one dwells, which is the inner pole.

It can be argued that the treatment of *ethos* by Hesiod and Theognis as an inner disposition elevates it to a location of individual traits, the hidden but characteristic part of a person - the place, as it were, to which one returns when one is really oneself.²⁹ Such an account, though, does not take into consideration the specific world view and way of life prevailing in the archaic (and classical) era in Greece. To be sure, it is a worldview that imposes a

²⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book VIII, 100, 101, 144.

²⁶ Theognis, *Elegies*, 963-970.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 213-4.

²⁸ Nancy Worman, *The Cast of Character: Style in Greek Literature* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), 30.

²⁹ This is the claim, for example, in Charles E. Scott, *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990), 144.

very specific conception of privileges and duties and of how these determine people's actions. As MacIntyre comments, in heroic societies "every individual has a given role and status within a well-defined and highly determined system of roles and statuses",³⁰ so that identity is the result of structures, the most important being kinship and the household. In this compact universe that assigns roles to each of its members, the linkage between action and personality is direct and virtues such as courage, *sophrosyni* and fidelity pertain to excellence and are considered as criteria for evaluating one's character. Not only do these virtues indicate the quality of one's character; they also define his position in the social order. Heroic ethos refers to the individual, is of an axiological nature and appeals to morality.

Given the social circumstances of the era, this ethos is only exhibited in public. More specifically, it is in the field of contest, of *agon*, which is a public field, that men are expected to project and in fact demonstrate the characteristics that define them. As one commentator has posed it, "Homeric man has no innerness...He has no hidden depths or secret motives".³¹ All he is, is what he shows himself to others to be, the qualities and dispositions he brings with him in the *agon*. In the ancient Greek society, performance is decisive in proving one's character, since it is actions that are used as criteria according to which one is judged by the community. *Arete*, the ultimate term to describe courage and goodness, is not something that one just possesses; rather, it is something that man has to prove he possess by performing virtuous actions either in the battlefield or in some other type of *agon*. Under these terms, "*arete* was thus not a telos, but rather a constant call to action that produced particular habits".³² This is why the identification of ethos with an inner place appears problematic. It is performed, lived and experienced in public. Otherwise it has no meaning at all.

As this short review reveals, the term ethos dates back to the archaic era where its instability and multiple usage are already discernible. Far from

³⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 122.

³¹ James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994 exp.), 21.

³² Debra Hawhee, "Agonism and *arete*" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35, no. 3 (2002), 187.

being explicitly placed in a political context, the term is used by poets to denote a dwelling, a locus of security, peace and return to a customary place either for men or for animals. It is also used to describe the mores of a specific group, which are to be acquired through teaching, and therefore a social trait shared by the members of the group. Elsewhere, ethos is the inner characteristic of the individual, a trait that describes him/her in a distinct way and is observable by the others; hence its volatility. To be sure, the affirmation of ethos as a thievish, deceitful disposition, in that it is multifaceted and variegated, is close to the argument to be developed in this thesis that *metis is a vital aspect of ethos*. However, such a formulation is too restrictive: it is an ethos that can be politicised but it is insufficient to the calls for democratic acting. At last, ethos in tradition is also the code of practice that one has to follow, and prove that one follows, by performing specific actions that are desirable and acceptable by the community. This oscillation of the term between the inner and the outer, that which is spiritual and private and that which is affirmed as a social code and is then connected to external action, is definitive of the genealogy of ethos. For, as the discussion that follows reveals, this fluctuation accompanies the use of the term in the field of political theory. Even more importantly, it is the interaction between the public and the private character of ethos that ensures its prominent role in politics and, as will be argued, in democracy.

III. Ethos in Political Thought: Plato and Aristotle

The classical age indicates a shift in the use of the term ethos, a shift that is to be attributed not so much to its content, since it is still used to describe behaviours and attitudes of habitual nature, but mainly to its *re-contextualisation*. This is anything but irrelevant to the shift that occurs in philosophical thought with the turn from observation of the natural world to speculation about the human itself and which brings issues such as virtue, justice and the good to the forefront of philosophical inquiry, “disengaging the

political from the natural order".³³ It is not only that now the mantle of ethical discourse embraces the term *ethos*, connecting it in a vulgar way to morality; the shift is mainly related to the new localisation of the term, since the discursive *topos* in which *ethos* is encountered now shifts from poetry to the field of political philosophy, in which it obtains a prominent place.

Plato is the first to offer us a discussion of *ethos* as related to political life, even if he does so in a specifically moral manner. It is through the mouth of his teacher Socrates that he introduces the idea that *ethos*, conceived as an individual moral quality, is connected with the political life of the city, an account related to his conceptions of citizenship, knowledge and virtue. Plato bridges his perception of *ethos* with political life when he introduces the idea that the exercise of politics is restricted to those who are of a higher moral quality: the political arts or the art of good citizenship may not be exercised by just any member of the *polis*. This is not irrelevant to his central doctrine, that is the absolute superiority of genuine knowledge and the denial of the possibility that virtue may be taught. In his dialogue *Protagoras* Plato follows a metaphysical grounding of knowledge with idealistic viewpoint in search of human well-being (*eudaimonia*) which leads him to create a world of perennial and imperishable ideas (*ideae*) or forms (*eide*).

This is further developed in his *Republic*, where Plato envisions a polity in which philosophers would reign and this would lead both society and its members to experience moral improvement.³⁴ In the cave allegory, the world of human affairs is described as a rather harsh condition, which the philosopher escapes from to speculate on the bright, perennial world of *eide*. Plato expresses faith in philosophers' ruling abilities since they, unlike rhetoricians or sophists, draw their skills from their access to the absolute knowledge, that of justice, the Good and city's ends, and thus of happiness, a knowledge that renders them the sole human beings suitable to create order in societies. Political power and philosophy must coincide.³⁵ This praise of absolute knowledge leads Plato to express disdain towards common

³³ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004 exp. edition), 29.

³⁴ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 35.

³⁵ Plato, *Republic*, Book V, 473d-e.

people's skills in politics, an art that he believes belongs solely to the expert, the statesman (*politikos*), the one who possesses the knowledge of how to rule justly and well, that is to say, to the city's best interest.³⁶ Politics in Plato is the business only of those having access to a higher morality.

The rationale of this argument is deployed in Plato's discussion of the regimes or types of government and the way they are connected to the souls of their citizens, a discussion which is held in the context of Plato's enquiries on morality. Thus, already in Book II of *Republic* he introduces the idea that justice lies in a man as in a city and so by examining the issue of justice in the larger part, where it is more discernible, and then in the smaller part, the individual, it is possible to come up with a productive comparison and thus a conclusion as to the nature of justice.³⁷ This idea is further explored in Book VIII, where Plato introduces an analogy according to which not only is the quality of the city analogous to the quality of its citizens, but also each of the regimes that are recognised as the five possible constitutions of human societies are informed by the dispositions, the character or ethos located in the souls of the individuals that inhabit and govern it.³⁸ As he puts it, states are made of the *ethe* of their citizens, of *ethe* of those who live in the city (*ek ton ethon ton en tais polesin*). The states are as men are; they grow out of human characters. The individual ethos shapes and determines the constitution of the *polis*.

It is for this reason that Plato claims that by examining first the *ethe* of the city and then the *ethos* of the individual citizen a connection between them is established, so that it becomes possible to see where justice lies and how it is connected to happiness. Apart from his ideal imaginary state, the aristocracy, that he has already discussed extensively, as well as the individual counterpart to it, Plato discerns four other types of regime and their corresponding individual: timocracy and the timocratic man and in a parallel way oligarchy, democracy and the ultimate political disease, tyranny. As Plato characteristically puts it, this relation cannot but exist, since regimes cannot

³⁶ John M. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 294.

³⁷ Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 368e-369a.

³⁸ Plato, *Republic*, Book VIII, 543c-544e.

spring from “oak and stone”; rather, they grow from their very citizens. It is exactly for this reason that it is the very citizens that are to be blamed for the failure of each of these regimes: whereas the timocratic city is inhabited by ambitious and supercilious men, the oligarchic is inhabited by mercenary people, who only care about money. In the case of democracy, on the other, the democratic man who lives in a regime of freedom and *parrhesia*, is ready to ignore the pursuits that make a statesman credible and trustworthy and to honour anyone who happens to claim that he is a friend and protector of the people.³⁹ It is citizens’ individual ethos that is to be blamed for the fall of each of the regimes.

According to this line of critique, people are incapable of exercising political ruling, a capacity available only to the philosopher, to the holder of true knowledge. Political philosophy is pointing out the exit from the darkness and the distorted reality of the cave, whereas politics itself is a source of trouble for human society. As Wolin has put it, for Plato “politics was evil, and hence the task of philosophy and of ruling was to rid the community of politics”.⁴⁰ Paradoxically, even his ideal regime, aristocracy, is doomed to failure since even the excellent education provided to the guardians will not prevent the “mixing up of iron with silver, of copper with gold”; antagonism and hostility are inherent in human societies.⁴¹ But this is contrary to the end of any community which, according to Plato, is to eliminate internal strife in order to gain harmony and stability; the only solution Plato sees is to eliminate the citizenry from public life. Not only does Plato estrange a science from its subject matter, “those phenomena [...] that made such an art and science meaningful and necessary” but, through his city-soul analogy, he also drains democracy from its own soul, that is its citizen, by devaluing him to a “character motley and monifold, like democratic regime itself”.⁴² Plato by analysing morality and moral behaviour as justice and as the trait of the just man, and by having individual ethos inform the regime of the city, aspires to elevate morality at the collective level and thus to offer a generalised account

³⁹ Ibid., 558b.

⁴⁰ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 39.

⁴¹ Plato, *Republic*, Book VIII, 546a-547a.

⁴² Plato, *Republic*, 561e.

of it. But despite his aspiration, Plato fails to provide a public account of ethos since his analysis restricts it to a single form of moral character, to an individual inner trait, to a personality that is judged in the public field for its success or failure to achieve specific moral standards and behaviours. Plato not only confuses the inner and the outer poles of ethos, failing to honour the interplay between them but also, by restricting the idea of ethos to a moral category which belongs to only some people, he falls for an elitism that depoliticises his work. His is a moralised approach to ethos that fails to explicate its political character.

Aristotle, originally a student in Plato's Academy, is the first thinker who manages to actually put ethos in a political context and articulate an account of it proper to the politics of the city. Aristotle re-contextualises what Plato says and he differentiates himself from his mentor, not only on the issue of recognising a central role for the citizens of a city, that is the individuals who comprise it and are capable of sharing in the administration of justice and in offices.⁴³ He also elaborates on Plato's account of the moral character to offer us a more detailed analysis of virtues and of political participation. Aristotle abstains from adopting a conception of ethos that is detached from the ancient Greek public life and what takes place in it, that is from politics, offering thus an extended, enriched and indeed political account of ethos. However, as I discuss in this next section, the Aristotelian civic ethos is necessarily a fixed one, an account resulting from his view of the state. In the end, Aristotle is not very different from Plato by means of aspiring to an ideal, a *polis* that dictates its citizens' behaviours and actions. The section, however, argues that Aristotle is an important contributor to the discussion about ethos for he succeeds to connecting it to the specific moment of political justification.

In contrast to Plato, Aristotle does not see morality as a solely personal concern. As Ingemar Düring, one of the most wide-read analysts and commentators of Aristotle's work has argued, Aristotle's philosophy is one of human co-existence and his understanding of ethics has a meaning only in a public context: there is no single connotation in any of his works that he separated between ethics (as a personal ethics) and politics (as social

⁴³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1275a19.

ethics).⁴⁴ In his main ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle aspires to determine the content of human excellence, of *arete* and he suggests that it is of a twofold nature, the intellectual and the ethical.⁴⁵ Whereas the first can be created and developed through learning, the second can only be the result of a process of habituation, of performing virtuous actions repeatedly and patiently, that is through *hexis*.⁴⁶ The virtues that are highly valued are not engendered in us by nature: their acquisition demands customary practice and exercise. Aristotle explicitly states that *hexis* has a meaning only in the context of public life, since it is by performing those actions which occur in our intercourse with other men that we acquire and expose virtues such as justice or courage, mildness or wrath.⁴⁷ By performing virtuous actions, says Aristotle following Plato, we form a virtuous character or, what he refers to as an *ethos*. *Ethos*, then, is achieved through guided development and habituation and is highly connected to the performance of actions and, more specifically, interactions. As such, it cannot exist in isolation; by definition it requires possible or actual others.⁴⁸ Moreover, and since according to Aristotle no moral virtue is engendered in us by nature, *ethos* cannot be read as a person's property or as something stable and unchangeable. It has an experiential and shifting nature.

This shifting nature becomes evident in Aristotle's work in another aspect, perhaps less evident but definitely equally crucial, for he does not constrain himself to the individualistic approach to *ethos*: elsewhere he provides a collective aspect. Aristotle is guided there by his account of *ethos* as character, but this time he attends to *ethos* as a quality that refers not to the individual, like Plato had done before him, but to the community of the city as

⁴⁴ Ingemar Düring, *Aristoteles: Presentation and Interpretation of his Thought* (Athens: 1994), Vol. II, 206.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103a.

⁴⁶ Aristotle was not the first to suggest that *ethos* is related to *hexis*, since his teacher Plato had already stated this both in his *Republic* (518e) and his *Laws* (792e). However, it is in Aristotle that *ethos* acquires an absolute and deep relation to *hexis*, see Arthur Miller, "Aristotle on habit (*ἥθος*) and character (*ἦθος*): Implications for the rhetoric" *Speech Monographs* 41 (1974), 309-316.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 1103b.

⁴⁸ Karen Burke LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois, 1987), 45 cited in Nedra Reynolds, "Ethos as location: New sites for understanding discursive authority" *Rhetoric Review* 11, no. 2, (1993), 333.

a whole. In his *Politics* Aristotle makes a strong claim regarding the happiness of the individual, which according to him coincides with the happiness of the state,⁴⁹ so that all its members, the citizens, will pursue what is good for the city, since this would result in their own benefit. Men become good and sound citizens due to two different yet related factors: habituation and education. And here is also where the task of political science enters, since its paramount target, its *telos*, is to form the characters of the citizens, so that they are disposed to perform noble actions.⁵⁰ This combination of education and *praxis* resulting from habituation is for Aristotle the key to the spontaneous participation of the good citizen in politics, for the formation of the ethos of the *polis*. Contra Plato, it is not the city that acquires its content from its citizens; instead, it is the citizens' character that is formed through the established practices of the city. The *polis* is prior to its citizens, it is natural and it holds a specific ethos that it infuses into its citizens. However, it is not merely that Aristotle reverses Plato by transferring the weight from the individual to the community; he also introduces a third axis that connects ethos to the moment of political justification.

This is to be found in his *Rhetoric* and in the connection he establishes between ethos and the task of the rhetorician. In this text Aristotle seems to offer a handbook on the craft of rhetoric but, unlike those who have attempted the same enterprise before him, Aristotle develops an account of *enthymemes*, that is rhetorical syllogisms, and of the importance for persuasion of metaphors and analogies. To achieve his goal, the speaker has three sources of conviction: *ethos*, that is his personal character, *pathos*, that is the emotional state of his audience, and *logos*, that is the argument itself.⁵¹ Aristotle justifies the importance he places on the personal character of the rhetor following the reasoning that people believe good men more fully and more readily than others. When we think that someone is a good person, that is of a good character, we tend to think him credible. But credibility in Aristotle, in contrast to, let's say, Isocrates, does not refer to the already shaped and given opinion of the audience about the orator's character;

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VII, 1324a5.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1099b30-32.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book I, 2, 1356a.

rather, it must be combined with *logos*, the argument at the exact time of its articulation and is thus highly connected to the orator's rhetorical competence. However, credibility is not adequate in itself and the notion of ethos in Aristotle is not exhausted in it, since one equally important factor is the speaker's ability to understand human character, that is to be able to comprehend and appreciate the disposition of the hearers. By doing so he becomes capable of selecting and using those references and parts of the discourse, those *enthymemes*, that will contribute to convincing his audience. In this account, ethos is intimately bound up with the moment of political justification.

In summary, Aristotle offers a conception of ethos such that is suitable to social life and politics, by placing emphasis on "the conventional rather than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private".⁵² Pertinent here is the interpretation of ethos as the dwelling place known from the archaic era; for if this account is combined with the compact worldview prevailing in Greek archaic and classical societies, then Aristotle's ethos is the character that is most proper to the values of the community. That being the case, although on a first reading ethos for Aristotle refers to the character of the speaker, and thus can be interpreted as credibility, a closer reading reveals that this character is not a strictly individual trait; rather, it is incidental to the virtues, experiences and habits of the community or culture that envelops and forms this character. It is derived from the *polis* and hence it already has a public character. In these terms, ethos is also the sensibility that the speaker shows towards the characters of his audience, towards the specific values they share and honour and he displays this sensibility by using enthymemes that address both their hearts and minds. To state it in other words, the Aristotelian ethos refers to the certain qualities that citizens espouse and acquire *qua* citizens of the specific *polis* they live in. It is this ethos that renders them capable of performing noble actions, which in the Aristotelian philosophy translates to actions that contribute to the good of the city. Ethos here can be interpreted as a non-spontaneous, shared trait, that each member of the good city has attained through education but also through performance of actions which are required by him as a sound member of the

⁵² Michael S. Halloran, "Aristotle's concept of ethos, or if not his somebody else's" *Rhetoric Review* 1, no. 1 (1982), 60.

city. Thus stated, ethos refers to our concrete ways of Being-there in the *polis*,⁵³ in the place where we live with one another, in a *koinonia* with common ends. The city has a decisive role in the formation of the citizen's character. In Aristotle, there is a complex interaction between the public and the private: ethos is the character, but it is not an inner character but public. As such, it belongs to the individual, but it stems from the community. Aristotle sees ethos as being intrinsically public.

To schematize the trajectory of ethos in the tradition, it can be stated that there is an intricate interplay between the inner and the outer, the public and the individual, with the one informing and redefining the other. A term which is originally used by poets to describe the habitual place for animals and armies, but also the customs of a people, is later connected with the personality of the heroic individual who has to demonstrate his ethos through the performance of actions on the field of the *agon*. It is with this connotation that the term is transferred to the field of political thought, where it oscillates between two different accounts, the private and the public. Plato, who advocates the idea of a higher moral character, connects ethos to personality and treats it as a trait of the politically incapable individual. It is the ethos of citizen that nourishes and informs the quality of the regime and it is thus to be blamed for the unavoidable failure of every and any political constitution. By failing to connect citizenship with meaningful participation, Plato not only puts a science at odds with its subject matter; rather, he also equates ethos to morality, and indeed a decadent one, ostracising it from public life and failing thus to accommodate it in a political context.

Aristotle reverses the terms, places citizen at the centre of his vision of political life and he considers ethos as something public, that already belongs to the *polis*. He then moves a step further by way of discussing ethos as the interplay between the public and the private, for he thus attends to ethos as something that the citizen endorses in order to contribute towards his and therefore the city's end. Moreover, in an innovative way Aristotle introduces one challenging interpretation of the relationship between ethos and politics, the one produced through rhetoric. By equating ethos with the character of the orator, which at the same time is informed by the character of the

⁵³ William McNeil, *The Time of a Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2006), 80.

audience, Aristotle succeeds in connecting ethos to the moment of political justification.

Plato and Aristotle attend to ethos to deploy their arguments about political life, the ideal constitution and the role of citizen in it. But whereas the first completely abolishes the participation of citizen in politics, the latter places them at the centre of his enquiries, not least because man is by nature a political animal. Hence Plato offers an account of ethos that is highly moralised and indeed apolitical, whereas Aristotle appreciates the ambiguity of ethos and the interplay between the public and the private incorporated in it. However, his granting of precedence to the *polis* over man entails the (pre)existence of a city ethos that is *a posteriori* endorsed by its citizens. Not only do the citizens abstain from the creation of the ethos; they are expected to embrace it as fixed. Beyond the fact that such an account supposes that the city is capable of forming and bearing its own ethos, it also annuls the participation of the citizens in the process of forming their political life. Aristotle, by putting the ethos on the public level and acknowledging the interplay between the latter and the private is able to suggest the existence of a political ethos, but his formulations are insufficient to the democratic call for multiple public goods that are fugitively shared by individuals.

The chapter now turns to two modern thinkers who have been inspired by Aristotle and who attend to his work by way of discussing the issue of ethos. Hegel, who follows the Aristotelian idea of the state as formulator of citizens' attitudes, offers an account of political ethos that is restricted to a specific category of citizens, failing thus to provide inspiration for our discussion of a democratic ethos. Heidegger proves to be more useful for the argument of the thesis, since not only does he affirm the importance of the fact that individuals are 'thrown' in human communities, but in doing so he introduces the idea of elasticity of ethos in terms of it being adjustable to the circumstances.

IV. Ethos in Modern Political Thought: Hegel and Heidegger

Aristotle's emphasis on the impact of the city on individual's character is embraced by G. W. Hegel, a key figure in political thought who developed an approach to ethos attending to its collective aspect by introducing the idea of *Sittlichkeit*, that is ethical life or order, in contradistinction to abstract right and to morality (*Moralität*).⁵⁴ By doing so, Hegel intended to provide a theory of modern ethical life which would avoid the hitch of abstraction on which a normative understanding of ethics and thus Kant's theory of morality had been caught. However, Hegel did not wish to abandon the latter's ideal of free selfhood and for that reason his theory combines the "objective system of principles and duties" that form true conscience with the crucial issue of modern individual freedom, which constitutes the essence of the human spirit and subsequently the ultimate purpose of Hegel's teleology.⁵⁵ In other words, and in contrast to while at the same time with Kant, Hegel's proposal on ethos "represents a form of practical reason that, through self-reflection, is to raise the normative content and logic of inherited institutions and traditions to a universal level".⁵⁶ These institutions and traditions are part of a larger repository, that of ethical life.

Despite the fact that in his earlier work Hegel expresses his admiration for the ideal of the ancient Greek and Roman republics, exaggerating their harmonious and glorious ethical life,⁵⁷ his mature references to ethos clearly concern the modern state, with its unique characteristics of civil society and individual freedom. The latter is actualised only in ethical life understood both as the system of rational institutions (and so "objective" ethical life) and as an individual disposition to the institution's requirements. Ethical life, then, is the

⁵⁴ For the purposes of the current analysis I have used the notion of *Sittlichkeit* as it appears in the *Philosophy of Right*. Despite the fact that the term had already appeared in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, there is a clear shift in the use of the term in his latter work. For an overview of the possible interpretations for this shift, see Will Dudley, "Ethical life, morality, and the role of spirit", in D. Moyar and M. Quante (eds.), *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 130-149.

⁵⁵ Georg Wilhelm Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §137, 164.

⁵⁶ Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (New Baskerville: MIT Press, 1994), 93.

⁵⁷ Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), 444-476.

locus of harmonisation of the subjective with the universal will. Hegel justifies the direct link he establishes between ethical life and freedom in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, where he argues that “ethical life is the concept of freedom which has become the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness”.⁵⁸ That said, there is a concrete ethos, a *Sittlichkeit*, consisting of customs, relations and duties, that determines individuals’ practical reasoning and through which they become a free agent. Ethical life mediates between the universal and the particular, that is the system of laws and institutions that are regulated by rationality on the one hand and the subjective dispositions, the “actual living principle of self-consciousness” that bind individual will to the institution’s rational requirements. This web of institutions and rules, though, is not constraining since rationality is the means to liberate oneself from “mere natural drives and from the burden [...] as a particular subject in his moral reflections on obligation and desire” and “from that indeterminate subjectivity which does not attain existence [...] but remains within itself and has no actuality”.⁵⁹ Ethical life embodies the highest and most complex level of human consciousness, not only by combining abstract right and civil society, but by surpassing this combination.

Hegel was the first to argue that modernity is characterised by the existence of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), conceived as the space that intervenes between the family and the state and the realm where individuals develop economic relationships. Freedom in the modern world, he argues, is crystallised and actualised in the set of institutions that comprise this space, that despite depending on the state and its institutions for its function, still is separated from it. In this interspace, each individual is free to pursue his welfare and his own particular end, so that civil society is the field where the Idea of freedom is realised.⁶⁰ Even though each individual attains his basic ethical principles upon birth and whilst member of a family, the latter itself cannot exhaustively cover the needs of the individual. This can only be achieved through one’s participation in civil society, which offers the context for individuals to be educated into a more universal ethical life, as parts of a

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §142, 189.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, §149, 192.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, §184, 221.

chain or a continuum, so that their private interests, skills and ends attain a social character.⁶¹ Individuals need other free individuals, for the realisation of self-sufficiency requires the other particulars as well, such that “the subsistence and welfare of the individual and his rightful existence are interwoven with, and grounded on, the subsistence, welfare, and rights of all...”.⁶² It is their participation in this communal life that provides individuals with rights and duties which preexist them and go beyond human contingency. By attributing to civil society this role in shaping social ethics, “Hegel takes the bold step of predicating rationality not of individuals and their actions, but of the institutions and cultural context that makes action possible”.⁶³ Everyday practical reasoning occurs to citizens and allows their coexistence through, and because of, their belonging to a common ethical community.

At the same time civil society, with its conflictual individual and collective interests, embodies both the principle of particularity and that of universality, but the latter exists only in embryonic stage, being itself insufficient for the realisation of ethical life. The locus where the ethical spirit *per se* is actualised is the state, the form of political association that represents objective spirit and the ultimate human end.⁶⁴ Hegel clarifies that when examining the state he actually considers the Idea or Spirit of the state and thus no particular state; however, he avoids abstraction by acknowledging that the state “is not a work of art; it exists in the world, and hence in the sphere of arbitrariness, contingency, and error, and bad behaviour may disfigure it in many respects”.⁶⁵ What binds individuals to this body is political disposition, *patriotism*, meaning “not only a willingness to perform *extraordinary* sacrifices and actions” but “that disposition which, in the normal conditions and circumstances of life, habitually knows that the community is

⁶¹ Ibid., §187, 224-6.

⁶² Ibid., §183, 221.

⁶³ Steven B. Smith, “Hegel’s critique of liberalism” *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (1986), 134.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §258, 275.

⁶⁵ Ibid., §258, 279.

the substantial basis and end”.⁶⁶ The bureaucrats form the backbone of the modern state. According to Hegel, these civil officials, with their ability to stand above their self-interest and to apply universal norms, form a universal class since their activities aim at the realization of universal interests.⁶⁷ The purpose of the state is to infuse its citizens with a consciousness of objectivity and universality, a consciousness that comes to enhance and complete the communal spirit that the antagonistic realm of civil society bears. The Hegelian ethos is a collective trait, a common disposition shared by every free person as member of a specific community, being that civil society or the state.

Hegel's account of ethical life as the field of realisation of freedom is challenging, but there is an ambiguous side in his analysis which renders his paradigm disadvantageous to an approach to ethos that aims to have a political dimension. This seems to be also the essence of Marx's (in)famous critique of Hegel's dialectical account of the relationship between the state and civil society. This critique stems from the different articulations of the relation between freedom and the material nature of civil society provided by the two thinkers.⁶⁸ Marx claims that the distinction between two spheres of ethical life, the sphere of civil society and that of political state, results in different accounts of the individual, the pursuer of the private interest in the first instance and the political participant in the second. Moreover, the fact that not every member of the social order participates in the political state, since “civil society would abandon itself as such if all its member were legislators”,⁶⁹ results in a dual approach to citizenship, thus excluding some from the quality of political citizenship. Marx is worried that the modern state is not so neutral as Hegel had it; that, in fact, the supposed subordination of the state to society's *Sittlichkeit* is only a covert subordination of *Sittlichkeit* to the state, so that it is not the general needs and interests that are promoted and satisfied, but that of the bureaucracy, of a specific class that “is the

⁶⁶ Ibid., §268, 288-9.

⁶⁷ Ibid., §205.

⁶⁸ David Duquette, “Marx's idealist critique of Hegel's theory of society and politics” *The Review of Politics* 51, no. 2 (1989), 218-240.

⁶⁹ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 119.

imaginary state alongside the real state”.⁷⁰ That is to say, the Hegelian claim that bureaucracy constitutes a “universal class” and that the state is capable of realising human universality is actually an illusory one; instead of incorporating the particular in the universal interests, in fact it only promotes the interests of a single class of individuals. Marx’s answer is to eliminate civil society and to fold individuality into communal life.

Hegel concurs with Aristotle that one becomes good as the citizen of a state with good laws; by doing so he acknowledges that it is the social environment that shapes and determines our moral and political attitudes and therefore he acknowledges the pre-existence of a public ethos. He appeals to this ethos not as something that belongs to individuals but as the set of established and customary practices that guide the ethical behaviour of individuals *qua* members of a political community that bears a core of common beliefs and procedures. Additionally, though, the Aristotelian ethos incorporates an individual dimension as well, one that takes into consideration the dispositions and stances, that is the character, of a specific person and the ways in which this character is the product of self-cultivation and instruction. Both thinkers appeal to ethos in their attempt to investigate and explain the possible interrelations between inner values, judgments and ethical commitments on the one hand and the social norms and attitudes that allow and even characterise the life of a political community, on the other. To be sure, neither Aristotle- as has already been discussed- nor Hegel were democrats. The latter explicitly considered constitutional monarchy the best regime. More importantly, Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit* is problematic, not least because of its authoritative nature, since it recognises the higher authority of the social laws that the individual must conform with.⁷¹ It is introduced as an unquestionable set of customs, mores and laws inherited by the individual. As such, it gives the individual no standards or principles outside of those that are given to him by ethical life.⁷² He has no choice but to assent to the laws of the community. Most importantly, the Hegelian articulation of *Sittlichkeit* allows limited room for an actual political

⁷⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁷¹ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §146, 190.

⁷² Frederick Breisler, *Hegel* (New York, Routledge, 2005), 237.

interpretation of ethos: his “politics of inclusive community”⁷³ celebrates individuality while it folds it into a complex totality, a state or an ethical community with a concrete and distinct shape. Political participation is actually saved only for a certain number of its citizens, those who embrace a specific ethos which allows them to move beyond and above self interest. Despite his admiration for Aristotle, Hegel, with his absolute priority of the community over the individual is perhaps closer to Plato.

Hegel develops his account of ethos to sustain his particular vision of the modern state, that is a vision of an organic state with a pluralistic structure in so far as it is a state with intermediate groups that actually contribute to its stability.⁷⁴ Such a modern state is distinct from the ancient Greek and Roman republics not only in the idea of individual freedom that it introduces but mainly because of the mediating role it attributes to the market-based civil society as the space between the family and the state. Thus, the modern state not only is the embodiment of concrete freedom, allowing and indeed requesting the individual flourishing; it is also the community of free agents who recognise and accept one another as such. Its citizens are identified with it through a habitual attunement to its codes and values, acknowledging that this satisfies their particular interests and by doing so in the context of the concrete state they succeed in overcoming the danger of alienation. The state is for Hegel the site of realisation of the Spirit in history. The Hegelian individual is not only bound up with the state: his purpose of life is actually informed by the latter. With Plato and Aristotle, Hegel sees the ultimate value of life achieved only in the context of the state. Most importantly, the latter now has the form of the nation state, “the absolute power on earth”: the state is the nation’s spirit and this is the reason that each nation has a constitution suitable to it.⁷⁵ The modern state has a distinct ethos, a concrete way of life and therefore its own character that gives meaning to the otherwise undefined life of the individual. It is only as a citizen of this state and thus by espousing its *Sittlichkeit* that the individual acquires access to freedom.

⁷³ I borrow the term from William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), 86.

⁷⁴ Breisler, *Hegel*, 241-2.

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §274, 223.

Such an organic account of the state did not go without criticism from intellectuals in Europe who saw in the claim that there is an intrinsic purpose in life that is imposed on the individual by a certain kind of community a threat to individual autonomy and existence. For them, the historically specific destiny that the community must realise, and with which the individual is bound, is an ideal that drains him from his freedom. Nietzsche, for example, opposed the view that the highest goal of mankind is the state and thus that the highest goal of man is a duty to serve the state.⁷⁶ To him, the function of the organic state aspires to the annihilation of the individual, who is destined to be improved into a useful *organ of the community*.⁷⁷ Hence Zarathustra's denunciation of the nation state, this "new idol", as the coldest of all cold monsters: where real men still exist the state, with its lie that it embodies the people, cannot be understood.⁷⁸ But, perhaps not surprisingly, Nietzsche's views were completely untimely, out of joint for his times, during which the nation state and the romantic folk images it was connected with overtook the whole Continent.

This is the setting within which the work of one of the most prominent European thinkers evolved; a thinker whose writings are partly inspired by those of Nietzsche, and maintain attentiveness to the temporal and topological specificity of human existence which, we saw, was important in Hegel. For Martin Heidegger the man that poses questions about being, the Dasein, does not exist isolated; rather, he is always historically and spatially delimited in a totality, a community. It is his account of the world, and more specifically of the human being as Being-in-the-world, that shapes and defines Heidegger's political thought and the role of ethos in it. His meditations are important for he is able to provide us with an account of ethos that highlights the importance of the situations in which we find ourselves *qua* citizens of a specific community. For the Heideggerian Being gains its quality only as already existing in the world; the latter is not

⁷⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 148.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), § 473, 173.

⁷⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus spoke Zarathustra", in W. Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 160-1.

“beheld”, it is dwelled in.⁷⁹ Into this world the Heideggerian being is ‘thrown’ and exists already with others, hence it is a “with-world” (*Mitwelt*).⁸⁰ Although some might contest Heidegger’s contribution to political theory,⁸¹ his existential analytic of Dasein engages in a task of political significance and impact, as the analysis of his account of ethos reveals.

Heidegger by way of developing his ideas on the question that persistently concerned him, that is the essence of being, offers us an individualised account of ethos which is significantly based on his reading of Aristotle and, specifically, on the latter’s analysis of the interconnections between *logos*, *praxis*, time and ethos, on the one hand, and among these and the regime, on the other. The Heideggerian interpretation departs from a strong embrace of the community’s shared elements as a source of individuals’ character, without, however, completely renouncing its impact, while at the same time appreciating the dimension of time. Heidegger offers a fundamentally different understanding of the human community from Aristotle, for central to his theorisation is the notion of “destiny” as that which defines a community’s distinctiveness and particularity.⁸² Heidegger in his original reading of Aristotle concurs with the latter’s account of human being as a *zoon politikon* and the fact that this quality emanates from his ability to speak, to use *logos* (*zoon logon echon*). As he comments,

[i]mplicit in this determination is an entirely peculiar, fundamental mode of the being of human beings characterised as “being-with-one-

⁷⁹ Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 121.

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), §118, 111.

⁸¹ Apart from the established connection of Heidegger’s work with Nazism, (see for example Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) and Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), some authors claim that since Heidegger never developed a political philosophy, his political thought remains too abstract or limited. See for example Leo Strauss’ claim that “there is no room for political philosophy in Heidegger’s work” in Leo Strauss, “Philosophy as rigorous science and political philosophy” *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (1971), 30. Also Aubenque’s claim that “*Being and Time* is obviously an apolitical work”, cited in Dominique Janicquad, “Heidegger’s politics: Determinable or not?” *Social Research* 56, no. 4 (1989), 821.

⁸² For an extended analysis see Catherine H. Zuckert, “Martin Heidegger: His philosophy and his politics” *Political Theory* 18, no.1 (1990), 61.

another”, κοινωμία. These beings who speak with the world are, as such, through *being-with-others*.⁸³

Thus, like Aristotle, Heidegger places human beings in a community where they live *miteinander* in a common world with shared ends because their ability to speak attributes to them the aptitude for perceiving and distinguishing between what is good and evil. But the importance of the Heideggerian concept of the *Dasein* is not that it reaffirms the political and rational Aristotelian animal but, rather, that it shows how Being is determined by the potentiality of discourse.⁸⁴ Indeed, Heidegger’s phenomenological investigations of *Dasein* as finite and temporal urge him to take a distance from Aristotle when it comes to appreciating not only the individual, but also community’s exclusive capacity to guide individual’s actions. For Heidegger, not every virtuous action aims at satisfying a common end.

Heidegger justifies this in his exegesis of how being-in-the-world is achieved through logos, so that it is the result of being part of a speech community, of possessing and being possessed by language.⁸⁵ He demonstrates how certain values are not necessarily bound to a common end and in order to do so he uses the example of offering a gift to a friend. This action intends the friend’s satisfaction and, considering this, it cannot be placed within the wider context of established human attitude and be interpreted as a human habit. It is an action with a strict aim, that of serving the virtue of friendship by offering satisfaction to the friend. As Heidegger puts it, “there is no deliberating about the end; it is fixed from the outset”.⁸⁶ What is subject to deliberation is the means to achieve or provide the desired satisfaction. That said, what guides decisions and actions bound with some virtues, such as friendship or *eupraxia*, is the particularities pertinent to the specific circumstances under which the action is to be taken. As McNeil comments in his analysis of Heidegger’s work, “our deliberation cannot be

⁸³ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. R.D. Metcalf and M.B. Tanzer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 33.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §25, 22.

⁸⁵ Stuart Elden, “Reading *logos* as speech: Heidegger, Aristotle and rhetorical politics” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 38, no. 4 (2005), 292.

⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 42.

governed solely or primarily by the common norms that regulate the ethos of a given community and of a particular world".⁸⁷ Ethos is not prefixed; there is an element of elasticity in ethos that allows it to adjust to circumstances and be receptive to them. Our response to the situations in which we find ourselves as specific subjects, for example as friends or as democratic citizens, is of high importance in becoming ourselves, in approaching what Heidegger calls the "authentic self, the self which has explicitly grasped itself" and so its own possibilities are decisive in its conduct.⁸⁸ Discovering one's authentic self is, for Heidegger, a possibility of existence (the other one being inauthenticity) that is attained only when one realises who one is and what his destiny is.

Connected to the problematic of authentic self is one more point where Heidegger's departure from Aristotle regarding the exclusive impact of community in defining human conduct is apparent and this point is — once again — connected with the Heideggerian analytic of *Dasein*. The latter's ability to be authentic (*eigentliche*) results from its intrinsic possibility towards death, finitude, and therefore from the temporally and historically delimited character of its existence. However, authenticity does not prevail as a potentiality that is to be actualised, since "that would have to mean bringing about one's own demise".⁸⁹ Rather, the potentiality to be expected is that of death and so the latter must be understood as an anticipation of this possibility (being-toward-death), which allows "Dasein to disclose itself to itself with regard to its most extreme possibility",⁹⁰ reaching thus closer to authentic existence, to being-itself, to being the most-proper-being. However, given the fact that Dasein's mode of being entails its being absorbed by its world,⁹¹ in its movement towards authentic existence the Self is obliged to engage in a struggle with this world,

⁸⁷ McNeil, *The Time of a Life*, 83.

⁸⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §129, 121.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

with its normal world in which it has its possible roles and identities set for it. To be a proper, self-authenticating self, an individual must take its fundamental cues for living from its being, not from the standards of communal normalcy.⁹²

Being authentic entails being open to contingency and the opening of new possibilities and therefore being willing to abandon the comforts of everydayness.

Heidegger refers to the community as the common space shared by the individuals that decisively shapes their understanding of themselves and others. It is the fact of the *Dasein* being already with others, among others, being in history, that places it in the context of a community within which its destiny is to be fulfilled: "...if fateful *Dasein* essentially exists as being-in-the-world in being-with-others, its occurrence is an occurrence of the community, of a people..." (*Volk* in German).⁹³ Community perceived as *Volk* needs a state to secure its historical duration: "The State is the historical being of the *Volk*".⁹⁴ But this state is not, for Heidegger, the nation-state, this modern form of political organisation that reveals itself as the unquestionable, the unconditional site of the political; rather, it is the *polis* as the place in which man comes to dwell in a historical-ontological manner.⁹⁵ In this sense, Heidegger's *polis* is pre-political: it is the linguistic community that produces a *logos* that is the enabling means of co-existence. *Dasein*, as being there, in this particular time and place, entails not only the embrace of one's fate as an individual: it also requires that one recognises one's essential, unavoidable involvement in the destiny of one's people.

In discussing the political implications of Heidegger's elaborations it is important to examine the relationship he establishes between *praxis* and time, a relationship that is boiled down to the expression of *Augenblick*, the fitting moment of action, or the Greek *kairos*. It is his analysis of *kairos* that urges Heidegger to elaborate a concept of ethos that functions as a bridge

⁹² Scott, *The Question of Ethics*, 102.

⁹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §385, 352.

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Logic As the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, trans. W.T. Gregory and Y. Unna (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 136.

⁹⁵ Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political: Dystopias* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 118.

between the specific time of action and the general conduct one demonstrates as a member of a specific community. Heidegger interprets the concept of time as discussed in Aristotle's *Physics* in terms of a sequence of nows, where the three dimensions (*ecstases*) —past, present and future— are represented and translated in terms of now. Heidegger defines this approach as the vulgar or common understanding of time and criticises it for its emphasis on the present.⁹⁶ Rather, in accord with his existential analysis, Dasein is bound to the future, and while heading towards it, Dasein comes closer to itself. Heidegger suggests that if we are to understand and conceptually comprehend the meaning of being, we still need to turn to time, but now appreciating it as authentic temporality. The term that he chooses to describe his suggested account of time is *Augenblick, moment*: “The phenomenon of the Moment can *in principle* not be clarified in terms of the *now*. The now is a temporal phenomenon that belongs to time as within-time-ness [...] In the Moment nothing can happen, but as an authentic present it lets us encounter for the first time what can be “in a time” as something at hand or objectively present [...] Every present makes present, but not every present is “in the moment”...⁹⁷

An important aspect of the appropriate moment of action, the time of authentic action, Heidegger's *Augenblick*, is that it is informed by *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue that in Aristotle refers to one's ability to make proper judgements on specific issues and is usually translated as practical wisdom. For Aristotle, *phronesis* - as contrasted to *sophia* - is always pertinent to issues that are changeable and thus is a virtue that is related to action, whereas *sophia* informs thinking on what is general and universal.⁹⁸ Heidegger is indebted to the Aristotelian *phronesis* but he succeeds in going further than Aristotle by connecting the analysis of *phronesis* with the idea of temporality of action and claiming that “*phronesis* makes the situation accessible; and the circumstances are always different in every action”.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* trans. A. Hofstadter (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 256.

⁹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 311.

⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b.

⁹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 20.

Heidegger thus insists on the role played by the specificity of the situation in which *Dasein* finds itself at any time: that situation may vary and it is decisive in specifying the proper action that needs to be taken. However, it is not the case that *phronesis* is an external factor that influences and specifies action, in the sense that it is a study of the situation in which *Dasein* finds itself. Rather, it “belongs intrinsically to the acting. In every step of the action, *phronesis* is co-constitutive”.¹⁰⁰ By being so much connected to the transient situation, *phronesis* “is a look of an eye in the blink of an eye, a momentary look at what is momentarily concrete”.¹⁰¹ Moment and the action that takes place in it is always informed by *phronesis*.

For Heidegger, “the path on which *phronesis* discloses the situation of the action”, the means through which *phronesis* is carried out is deliberation, thorough discussion and thus logos, that takes place in the common space shared by human beings. This concrete way of living while being-with-one-another, is itself a knowing-a-way-around; it is a *techne*, which entails that the human being is capable of opening itself to and dealing with the world in which it is exposed: ‘This standing-out [in being-with-one-another] of the human being, this “comporting-oneself” in the world, this “comportment”, is το ἦθος.’¹⁰² Elsewhere he defines ethos as “man’s essential abode”, as “the open region in which man dwells. The open region of his abode allows what pertains to man’s essence...”.¹⁰³ Thus outlined, ethos refers to the way human being places itself in the world in relation to others. Ethos, then, for Heidegger, is twofold: in one aspect, it is our general and concrete behaviour as social beings; but on another, it is also temporally specific. It refers to a combination of our manner of response to the peculiar circumstances we encounter at the moment of action and our more general way of conduct as human beings, which is the result of our presence in a specific community. I believe that MacNeil’s reading of the Heideggerian account of ethos as

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰² Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 48.

¹⁰³ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on humanism”, in M. Heidegger and D. F. Krell, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 233.

dwelling formulates this twofold nature of ethos in a successful and constructive way:

ethos for Heidegger means our dwelling, understood temporally as a way of Being, yet such dwelling must be understood, on the one hand, in terms of our stance and conduct in the moment of action - the way in which we are held and hold ourselves, and thus “dwell”, in the presence of the moment - and on the other hand, in terms of our more enduring way of being that is brought about temporally in and throughout the unfolding of human experience.¹⁰⁴

Ethos thus conceived is not a stable and unchangeable trait of human being; rather, it is subject to diverse modification through logos. It has a dynamic and multiple nature, since it relates to phenomena such as character, space and time. Importantly, it is an ethos that is neither exclusively individual nor public: it is the result of a blending of the two dimensions.

Inspiring as I find Heidegger's association of ethos with the moment of action, there is a point where my formulation of a democratic ethos departs from him. Most specifically, I find the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* that Heidegger analyses and uses to construct his argumentation to be too stark a concept to inform the democratic ethos suggested here. In other words, despite honouring the occasion and the opportunity raised within it, the Aristotelian/Heideggerian *phronesis* is too stable and regular to serve the argument developed here. As a matter of fact, *phronesis* gains its stability by the fact that it is informed by *episteme*, that is by the principles that Aristotle, but also Heidegger, affirm as guiding practical reason. At the same time, however, it is also regulated through the experience gained through habituation. Democracy as discussed for the argument of the thesis is attentive to established principles, perceptions and regulation, but also to change, to the unpredictable encounters that participate in the democratic complex and which render it fluid and hence susceptible to the peculiarities of the occasion. It is for this reason that, as I will suggest in more detail in Chapter Six, if a democratic ethos is to be informed by an intellectual virtue this could be *metis* rather than *phronesis*.

¹⁰⁴ McNeil, *The Time of a Life*, xi.

In providing this analysis of Heidegger's aspiration to ethos, it is not only suggested that his work contains tools that help us to understand and describe political life; it is also the case that he offers an important exegesis of the political moment par excellence. It is the Heideggerian moment as the moment where the tension between the individual and the communal is disrupted, and despite its disruption - or, rather, because of it, - gives rise to the appropriate time and provides the definition of the constitutive political moment. This is not to downplay the fact that Heidegger, even for a very short period, openly expressed his support to the National Socialist Party; however, this choice can at least be understood considering the historical context within which Heidegger developed his ideas on community and state. The *Volk* has a spiritual historical mission to fulfill: it has to survive and bequeath its spiritual world, which Heidegger envisioned as "the forces that are rooted in the soil and blood of a *Volk*, the power to arouse most inwardly and to shake most extensively the *Volk's* existence".¹⁰⁵ Hegel is discernible here for, before Heidegger, he already explained how the effacement of ancient states was the result of a lack of infinite strength implied in a unity.¹⁰⁶ This seems to have been the fear of Heidegger: that the German people, and with it the German state, would disappear under the pressures of the technological and social transformations that modernity brings with it, disassociating people from their communities, unless unity was achieved. The idealised vision of a *Volk* served as the proper way of being-with-others, as the originary dwelling place of human beings and hence as the way to achieve the proper existence. This parameter limits the possibilities of using the Heideggerian account of ethos with reference to democracy, since it entails presupposing an ideal and appropriate mode of comportment. As I will suggest in the final chapter of the thesis, this limitation can be overcome if we substitute commonalities for the community defined by Heidegger in terms of homogeneity. Still, the fact that Heidegger's ontological and philosophical choices have been connected to a certain politics only opens a

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, "The self-assertion of the German university" (The *Rektoratsrede*), in Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 33-34.

¹⁰⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §185, 156.

question as to whether there is a unique pathway to connect *theoria* and *praxis*.

V. From Ethos as Place to Ethos as Dwelling Temporally

The investigation of the trajectory of the concept of ethos from antiquity to late modernity taken on in this chapter has shown that the term has always been closely connected to morality. Following a primarily topological usage during the archaic years, where it indicated a dwelling place, ethos, came to be used to signify the individual way of conduct, explicated in the public field and with the occasion of the *agon*, having thus an axiological nature. It is an individual trait but one that is played out in the public field. Its introduction in the political sphere coincided with the philosophical turn from the natural world to the human itself, and thus to the examination of the qualities that the virtuous subject must bear.

Although he connects it to political life by affirming it as the personal character that informs the state, Plato refuses to attribute a real political meaning to ethos: it refers to the character of the ordinary man, who ought not to have any role in the *polis* if the latter is to flourish. Political virtue is something to be sought by philosophers, living isolated in the abstract world of Ideas.

Aristotle, in a problematic way, offers three different accounts of ethos and he views it as expressing both the individual and the collective aspect, that is, as being both a personal disposition and a collective trait. To have ethos is to manifest the virtues most valued by the community. Elsewhere, ethos refers to the ability of the orator to choose the correct rhetorical devices, those appropriate to the moment of speaking, that will allow him to convince his audience. It, therefore, entails the element of adjustability and synchronisation.

The concept of ethos in its collective dimension was revived in the political thought of Hegel who finds ethos, or what he calls ethical life, to be fully realised only in the context of the state. Hegel is in agreement with Aristotle that one becomes a good person as a citizen of a state with good laws: it is

the social environment that shapes and determines our political and moral attitudes. However, his localisation of ethos within a certain space drains it of its political essence, not only because ethos is perceived by Hegel as preexisting man, and thus as guiding him through duties and rights, but also because his analysis presupposes that the virtues of *Sittlichkeit* are part of the mores, customs and laws of the society. Political virtue is saved only for those working in and for the state mechanism, that is the bureaucrats: they are the only cast expected to exhibit a certain political value. The Hegelian ethos is not only pre-political, an inherited and therefore unquestionable general mode of conduct but apolitical as well.

It is suggested here that it is in the insights of Heidegger that the sources for a political ethos can be detected. Writing during the collapse of the great empires and the triumph of the nation state, Heidegger envisions the human being as dwelling in a concrete community defined not in Aristotelian terms as *polis*, but for its particularity and distinct “destiny”. It is in the context of such a community that the human being exhibits its specific comportment, its ethos or the specific place it occupies, it dwells in the world and which pertains to its essence. Such an ethos is not merely the general way of conduct one adopts as member of the specific community; rather, it is a response, a timely rejoinder to the particular circumstances one encounters. Heidegger enables us to envision an ethos as our dwelling in the specific moment of action as we place our being in relation to others and the world. Still, political though it is, his ethos is barely a democratic one. The specificity of the context in which he places Being, that is a community with specific traits and destiny, renders his account of ethos too restrained. I discuss these limitations in the final chapter of the thesis, where I also turn to Deleuze to come up with a possible solution to avoid the Heideggerian reliance on community in the specific dimension in which he embraces it.

Foucault, on the other hand, as was discussed in the first section of this chapter, offers a more open, creative and assertive idea of ethos, one that bridges the personal with the public in no definitive way. Whereas Heidegger, inspired by Aristotle, shows the way towards the affirmation of the importance of an ethos attuned to circumstances, it is Foucault who poses the issue of developing (by way of cultivating) an ethos as a mode of placing ourselves in

a community. I draw from them my understanding of a democratic ethos as having a tactical nature in a double sense: not only does it require tactics to be cultivated, but it also is always relevant to the occasion, *kairos*, and this is exposed through the undertaking of tactics, of actions that are moment-specific.

In this chapter I have discussed the shifting nature of ethos from an inner characteristic to a collective trait. In doing so, I have shown that the relation of ethos to politics is characterised by ambiguity, not least because thinkers from antiquity to modernity aspire to it, sometimes to condemn it, but without being able to escape from it. To be sure, it is Heidegger's account of ethos as attuning to the circumstances together with Foucault's elaborations on ethical tactics that have inspired the vision for a democratic ethos embraced in the thesis, that is the idea of ethos as dwelling temporally and so as dwelling in the moment. However, to seek to elaborate such a vision entails that one engages into process of theorising democracy. The next chapter takes on a discussion of the theorising endeavour and on the endeavour of theorising democracy more specifically. In doing so, it attempts to relate the thesis to the discipline of political theory, to scrutinise the discourses that have determined democracy as an object of inquiry and to identify the leap that exists in the tension between democracy and the endeavour of theorising and which, as we shall see, is related to the issue of ethos.

Chapter 2

Theorising Democracy

Ethos confounds much contemporary democratic theory. Viewed from one angle ethos appears as a practice, embedded in the particular and everyday, far removed from the universal realms of normative theory. Yet, viewed from another angle ethos appears too abstract for empirical political theories to grasp, pulling away from the particular to the generality of conduct. This chapter attends to the ambiguity of ethos by way of discussing how classical democratic theorists attend to democracy as the question of the common, and to how this question is interconnected with ethos. The chapter then turns to contemporary democratic theory to show how the persistence of a binary, that is the development of too stark a division between normative and descriptive, theory and practice, in democratic theory, has blinded us to the importance of ethos. That importance in part consists precisely of the way in which it combines reflection on democracy as an ideal with its practice as a way of life and of orienting oneself to the world.

Although theorising democracy has been a labour of political theorists since antiquity, it is only in the 20th century that this endeavour has come to be perceived in terms of a stark dichotomy between 'normative' and 'descriptive' theories of democracy. Sheldon Wolin has described the issue in a characteristically sharp way, using the idea of 'vision'. Theorists, he suggests, 'look' at the world using two related senses of vision: in the first sense, 'vision', in the manner of scientific observation, produces a descriptive report about an object or an event; in the second sense, 'vision' contains an imaginative element that allows the theorist to understand what she couldn't in a direct way.¹ This division of theoretical styles and procedures, on the one hand the scientific specification of how a given democracy is thought to work, and on the other the abstracted normative specification of how any democracy ought to work has produced a vacuum at the heart of democratic discourse; one closely related to the failure to articulate a conception of democratic ethos.

¹ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 17-20.

Over the last 50 years or so democratic theory has been significantly and increasingly devoted to the construction of models based on observation of particular cases or more general conditions (close to the first sense of vision Wolin refers to). One might say that these efforts seem to overcome the classical prioritization of theory, in favour of more practical aspects of analysis. However, as this chapter will argue, this way of envisaging democracy has had a profoundly negative impact on the subject matter itself. It is vital that democratic theory be released from “the spectre of the correct theory” which haunts it, urging it to continue with a continuous, and always fruitless, hunt for the ideal democratic model, one that can save late modern societies from the political quagmire into which they have fallen.² What it takes to refresh democratic theory is a struggle from within, a re-articulation not only of the theory/practice relation, but also of what is perceived as theory and, most importantly, of what is conceived as democracy.

Reading democratic thought through the prism of ethos can lead towards that direction, since it reveals how ethos is inherent to democratic theorising, although not in a uniform manner. This is the task attempted in the thesis and this chapter explores the ambiguity of ethos in the context of various articulations of theorising democracy. As I will demonstrate, political theorists by attending to ethos can approach democracy from the aspect not only of institutions, rules and laws, but also of dispositions and attitudes. This is all important not least because it enriches our understanding of democracy as a task performed by individuals who are involved in politics not because of their profession but because they are tempted to do so whenever the circumstances allow or inspire them to; in other words, when their ethos guides them towards the direction of taking action, broadly defined. A democratic ethos, then, is neither a theoretical tool used to explain behaviour, nor a daily practice that cannot be grasped in normative terms. This is why neither descriptive political theory, as I will discuss in this chapter, nor normative political theory, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, can alone grasp the meaning and essence of a democratic ethos. We need to be more creative if we are to affirm the role of ethos.

² I borrow the phrase from Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 10.

Section I of this chapter attends to the tension within political thought, from antiquity to modernity, between theory and practice or norm and description. The purpose here is to open the discussion on the persistence of this rigid distinction and to show how this dualism is overcome only by Nietzsche, who introduces a third dimension, that of creativity. I want to suggest that this dimension must be incorporated into our attempts to theorise democracy, an endeavour undertaken by theories of agonism in Chapters Four and Five, but which I also undertake in Chapter Six.

Section II argues that there is a distinct 'classical' democratic discourse which has bequeathed to us concepts and ideas that persist in our contemporary democratic thinking, such as the idea of a common good, the principles of equality and freedom, as well as the issue of pluralism. As the thesis evolves, it will become evident that it is specifically around these concepts that democracy in late modernity unfolds and that especially pluralism proves to be a challenging issue of negotiation for democratic thinkers. I find that their differences notwithstanding, Pericles, Protagoras, Aristotle, Rousseau and Madison all conceive democracy as the quest of the common in a political society. Although not explicitly articulated, this common is envisioned as an ethos that inspires and unites citizens. These thinkers, I want to suggest, prove important for democracy because they manage to attend to it while transcending the distinction between theory and practice.

The attentiveness to the common, I argue, is suspended by the scientific mode of theorising that has predominated in the field of democratic thought during the last 50 years. Section III discusses how post-war 'scientific' political thought, with its stark separation between analysis and norm, has resulted in the estrangement of academic discourse from democracy and the impoverishment of political enquiry. It is argued that this division between facts and values is problematic for the object of democratic theory, that is democracy itself, since it brings about a distinction between two modes of theorising democracy which appear to be unbridgeable. Furthermore, the very same distinction creates a distance between democracy as something open to many interpretations and connectable to various values and principles, and theory as the endeavour that dictates the necessary contents of democracy. In advancing a critique of this strict division, the chapter is also

advancing a critique of the specific mode of theorisation that it represents, in order to propose an alternative, a creative and imaginative endeavour which is more pertinent to democracy.

I. Recasting the Theory/ Practice Relation in the Tradition

Today 'theorising' is synonymous with something like intentional and systematic reflection upon a specific subject, model or hypothesis in a way that needs to be verified (thus adding to 'theorising' connotations of normalisation, generalisation and even canonisation). This is anything but irrelevant to the original meaning of *theoria*, which semantically is related to "seeing" - to observation or contemplation, pertaining thus to vision. *Theoroi*, to be sure, were the emissaries of the city-states to oracles, who also carried the message for cease-fires before important games (*agones*); their presence in these games and other cultural rituals was shrouded in solemnity since they were attributed the status of official spectators, watching the event from distinguished places in the stadium. In other words, they were the distanced spectators of an action that was taking place and in which they did not participate. *Theoria*, thus, is connected to speculation of matters of higher importance and is distinct from *praxis*.

In the Platonic dialogues the person who is entrusted with the high duty of contemplating, counseling and deciding on the crucial issues of the *polis* is the philosopher. According to Plato, the man who lives the contemplative life, the philosopher, having access to the world of ideas and thus to *agathon*, is the one who can introduce the best laws and therefore is the most suitable person to rule. In his own words, unless there is a conjunction of political power and philosophic intelligence, there can be no cessation of troubles for the states of the human race.³ Plato, thus, attributes political and social traits to *theoria* —although under very specific and limited circumstances— and he places politics at the level of the prerequisite for its safeguarding.

Aristotle shares his mentor's opinion that *theoria* concerns the eternal and universal and he adds that, for this reason, only those who have already

³ Plato, *Republic*, 473d-e.

attained wisdom are able to exercise it; *theoria* is always connected to the absolute good, which according to him is *eudaimonia*.⁴ But unlike in Platonic thought, in Aristotle *theoria* is the alternative of and superior to action and thus two separated forms of life are discernible, the political life (*bios politikos*) and the contemplative life (*bios theoretikos*), the first exercised by the statesman and the second by the philosopher.⁵ The superiority of the latter stems from the fact that it is the result of *nous*, the best part of human *psyche*; its quality is even divine and such is contemplative life itself.⁶ *Theoria*, concerning the constant and unchangeable, unlike *praxis*, does not produce anything beyond itself.⁷ It is an end in itself.

The ancient Greek distinction between speculative and practical life, with the former given the highest evaluation as that which gives access to true knowledge, persisted through the ages and was only challenged systematically with the scientific revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries. British empiricists like Hume, for example, develop arguments that favour the role of the senses and thus experience in our attainment of knowledge. Hegel is among the first to propose an account that attempts to create a productive tension between theory and practice, by suggesting their dialectical unity. According to Hegel, the separation between theoretical and practical attitudes, that is between thought and will, is not as stark as thinkers before him had claimed. In fact, “the theoretical is essentially contained within the practical; [...] for one cannot have a will without intelligence”. They are distinct attitudes, but inseparable: “they are one and the same thing, and both moments can be found in every activity, of thinking and willing alike”.⁸ Marx, however, is skeptical about Hegel’s treatment of the relation between theory and practice. He famously states that philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, whereas the point is to change it.⁹ He

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b, *Politics*, 1324a.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1177b. *Praxis* (action) differs also from *poiesis* (production, craftsmanship) in that the latter results to the birth of a product, *Ibid.*, 1140a.

⁸ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §4, 35-6.

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Theses on Feuerbach” in *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).

problematizes the idea of 'the cunning of reason' which, according to Hegel, results in the realisation of the idea of reason in history, rejects the Hegelian idea that *praxis* itself cannot produce truth and proposes a concept of practice as the struggle of the working class. He does not, though, abolish theory. Rather, he sees the two moments as united in a relationship bound with the (material) interest of the working class: "Theory will be realised in a people only in so far as it is the realisation of their needs. [...] It is not enough for thought to strive to actualise itself; actuality must itself strive toward thought".¹⁰ But as Hannah Arendt has critically noted, despite the fact that Marx breaks with the traditional prioritisation of theory over practice, his thesis on the philosophers' role as interpreters of the world entails that it is only because of this very interpretation and only after it, that change is made visible and possible.¹¹ But perhaps all Marx wanted to suggest is that if change is to be achieved, the philosopher must be pioneer in this effort; the philosopher is a worker and a first-worker indeed.

Nietzsche, like Marx, also seeks to break with tradition by adopting its framework while at the same time rejecting its authority.¹² He also understands theory as inseparable from practice and he blames the man who claims to live a contemplative life, because he cannot shake off a *delusion*:

he fancies that he is a *spectator* and *listener* who has been placed before the great visual and acoustic spectacle that is life; he calls his own nature *contemplative* and overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating his life. [...] he certainly has *vis contemplativa* and the ability to look back upon his work, but he also has *vis creativa*...¹³

Creativity as a mode of being is central to Nietzsche's work, which aims to challenge the persistency of Platonism - in the form of Christianity - and the illusions it has bequeathed to modern society: for instance, the existence of

¹⁰ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, 138.

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken, 2005), 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W.Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 241.

an objective rational order and the stripping of humans from their instincts and passions. Instead, Nietzsche calls for a life-affirming attitude that embraces these suppressed instincts and passions and that elevates creativity to the position of the ultimate value, making possible the pursuit of a better and even happier life. Moreover, he suggests that we need to fold our personal experiences in our search for knowledge and to elevate these experiences to the level of data of a scientific experiment.¹⁴ Elsewhere, he urges people to approach “life as a means to knowledge”, instead of a duty, calamity or trickery,¹⁵ to demonstrate the possibility of forming a self more suitable to one’s own self, using one’s creativity to define one’s own standards. Nietzsche considers it possible that any attempt to separate theory from practice can be proved fateful and even dangerous for the endeavour of searching for knowledge. His “psychology of the philosopher” reveals that behind every theoretician, as he calls him, there is always an instinct that guides him to the quest of a specific knowledge, to the hunt of his own personal truth.¹⁶ He declares: “Not to live with two different standards! Not to separate theory and practice!”,¹⁷ since this would mean the failure to transcend the common, the traditional, the expected and thus the failure to become who we really are.

Where the ancients attended to theory as a superior activity, moderns renounced this attitude and sought to re-establish the relation between theory and practice either to favour the latter (like the British empiricists did) or to avoid exaggeration of the importance of either against the other (Hegel and Marx). But it is Nietzsche who not only considers them inseparable, but also introduces a third axis in the discussion, that of creativity, suggesting that beyond the spectator and the actor, there is another possible form, that of the creator. Humans have the ability to fashion something that had not been there before and this is their real value. It is this dimension of human ability that has been most neglected by those engaged in the endeavour of

¹⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹⁵ Ibid., 255.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 227.

¹⁷ Ibid., 252.

democracy, who seem to remain trapped in the norm-description dualism. The following section explores the roots of democratic theory by following five thinkers who are today accepted as classical. This opens the discussion regarding the sharp separation between theory and practice in democratic thought, the separation between two modes of theorising democracy, the normative and the descriptive, and the effect that this distinction has on political thinkers' attentiveness to ethos.

II. Democracy: Five Classical Considerations

Without any doubt, the study of democracy is not an exclusively late-modern endeavour; political theory has a long history and democracy has been a focal point of it since its very beginning. However, that history has not led to convergence and consensus. A large body of knowledge of democracy has been accumulated, so disparate and rich, but there is little agreement over the best way to study it. To be sure, already the Greek philosophers of the fourth century B.C. were engaged in systematic analyses and discussions concerning this way of organization of the political life, of *politeuesthai*, so that in searching the roots of the word itself we need to go back to ancient Greece.¹⁸ Considering that democracy, according to its etymology, refers to the rule of the *demos*, that is of the people, and taking into account all the relevant information regarding the practical realisation of this rule, perhaps it would not be too much to say that democracy, at least in its ancient context, was more like an amalgam of practical attitudes than a political regime.¹⁹ Thus Plato describes democracy as resembling a grocery, the place where a plentitude of moral values and characters can be found and where anyone can choose between those that he prefers.²⁰ Democracy was an integral

¹⁸ According to Herodotus, some early forms of democratic life can be tracked back in several Hellenic cities of the beginning of the 5th century B.C., but democracy actually was crystallized in Cleisthenes's Athens (508-7 B.C.) and was culminated in Demosthenes's days (355-322 B.C.), in Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 21.

¹⁹ Periklis Vallianos, *Editor's Preface*, in the Hellenic edition of Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* (Athens: Kritiki, 2005), 64.

²⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 557d.

aspect of people's daily life, since anyone who was entitled with the status of citizen used to spend his day time in the market, discussing and making judgements on political and juridical issues. Today any regime characterised as a democracy bears a great difference from what was perceived as a democratic way of life in the Greek ancient *poleis* and this has little to do with the effacement of these city-states.

The study of the evolution of democratic thought is essential not only in order to grasp the general terms which have shaped contemporary discussion in the field, but also to reveal the development of the relationship between theorising democracy and democratic practice (and thus also the ways in which ethos has slipped in and out of conscious consideration). A political thought that has *ex posteriori* been characterised as classical democratic theory is said to cover the period from classical Athens to the years that the Europeans challenged absolutism and Americans fought for an independent state.

As will be discussed later in the chapter, political thinkers sometimes consider the texts of this period to form a concrete body of knowledge, where others challenge its consistency and even the very idea that there exists a classical democratic theory. To be sure, some of these texts are at the boundaries of what can be considered as theorising. They are highly heterogenous, some of them being full of thick descriptions, written in relation to specific political occasions, whereas others are abstract reflections on desirable and possible situations. But whatever the intentions behind them, their reading can provide insights upon which modern democratic theory has been developed as a field of political enquiry. As the analysis that follows will show, heterogeneity has been a characteristic trait of the field and a plurality of different democratic theories — not only of the past but of the present — is the rule, not the exception. In this respect it would be more accurate, and productive, to think of these as separate and distinct, to speak of democratic theories in the plural instead of a single democratic theory.

Of course, it is neither possible nor necessary, in the confined contexts of the present thesis, to present a comprehensive reflection on the history of political thought. Rather, the intention here is to consider some of the moments in that history which have come to exercise the greatest influence

upon the way in which we arrange our concepts of democracy and to indicate the sometimes paradoxical effects this has upon thinking of ethos. Pericles' famous funeral oration is foundational in this respect. It depicts the ideal of democracy both as an administration and as a way of being that it is worth celebrating and defending. It is an example of an approach to democracy understood as a way of life, a mode of political being. After Pericles we will consider a thinker who is a most ambiguous figure in political theory. Protagoras, so-called sophist, is presented here as the first theorist of democracy, since he attributes to *arete* a political value attainable by each and every individual. Aristotle, on the other hand, is a well-established figure in political thought, who engages in a philosophical discussion of democracy as one possible form of government. The *Politics*, as we shall see, can be read as a treatise on political life, among others, whereas the body of his work sets the foundations for a democratic thought developed through the ages from Rome to 18th century Europe. Rousseau's ideas of democracy, for example, draw on Aristotle's, in that he is also critical of democracy and more eager to describe a possible ideal form of government suitable to human societies. James Madison follows the same path, condemning democracy and proposing instead a ruling system able to manage interest groups.

As is evident, the thinkers scrutinised here are not chosen because of their strong support for democracy; indeed only the first two preferred democracy to other regimes, whereas the remaining three condemned it. What is most important here is not the way in which Aristotle, Rousseau and Madison condemn democracy. Rather, I wish to show how their formulation of the ideal democratic regime involves an aspiration to what is to be common in an already given political community, while also blending normative ideas with practical considerations of the political reality they experience. This section of the chapter, then, shows how the idea of the common is embedded in traditional democratic thought; how, indeed, the question of the common is the essence of democracy itself and how a conception of ethos is already embedded in this question.

It has been argued that the Greeks did not actually produce a democratic theory. Finley, for example, writes:

The Greeks themselves did not develop a theory of democracy. There were notions, maxims, generalities, but these do not add up to a systematic theory. The philosophers attacked democracy; the committed democrats responded by ignoring them, by going about the business of government and politics in a democratic way, without writing treatises on the subject. ²¹

This is highly contestable. Certainly it presumes too much about what one should understand to be the enterprise of theory. It is true, for example, that Pericles did not engage in a systematic reflection on democracy. However, it is equally true that he was one of the most competent and inspired leaders of the city, who managed to transform a funeral oration intended to honour the citizens who fell in the war against Sparta into an encomiastic address on democracy. It is his specific speech that is scrutinised here, rather than his overall activity as a democratic leader or thinker. That speech matters in part because it has itself become an historically effective landmark for those orienting themselves towards democracy. This is so because his speech is a praise of democracy interpreting it as a way of life that inspires citizens and motivates them to take action at multiple levels.

Pericles was a citizen, general and politician of Athens, but his oration reveals that he was also an enlightened political thinker and a fervent supporter of democracy, the one who Thucydides acclaims as “the first citizen of Athens”.²² To be sure, his politics have not gone without criticism, not only for his management of the public Athenian money, but also for his questionable ability to control the masses and the aristocratic authority that this entailed.²³ Yet, in the process of praising the originality of the Athenian democracy, with its positive effects on the citizens themselves, Pericles

²¹ Moses I. Finley, *Democracy: Ancient and Modern* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996, exp. edition), 28.

²² Thucydides, “Pericles’ Funeral Oration” in *The Peloponnesian War*, 2.65.

²³ Mortimer H. Chambers, “Thucydides and Pericles” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 62 (1957), 82.

provides a thorough insight into what a democratic way of life could be thought to consist in. Democracy is defined as the administration that favours the many instead of the few and that is characterised by freedom and equality, which prevail both in public life and in citizens' private life as well. Although these two domains of life are separate, the latter becomes meaningful only as a result of the first since Athenians do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is unambitious, but that he is useless.²⁴ Pericles aims to prove that Athenians are not called to defend a mere land; they are urged to defend a specific way of life, the democratic, one shared by every citizen, the free and active participatory member of the city. This way of life is not limited to the field of politics, and so has not only to do with procedures and decision-making; rather, as Pericles says, it is directly connected to citizens' character, psychology and behaviour. As such, it is depicted also in their attitude in the battlefield, where they prove to be courageous not because of the dictate of the law, but exactly because of their democratic way of life.

For Pericles, then, the *polis* is a collective entity, which means that its survival, function and prosperity is not the mere sum of the individual well-being of its citizens; rather, it has its own character, the democratic one. This is the reason that he exhorts the Athenians to realise the power of Athens and by doing so feed their eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills their hearts.²⁵ Pericles' funeral oration is important to democratic thought, not only because it describes a political system of freedom, harmony and justice. It is important also because it *interprets* this system as an ideal form of being not only for the *polis* but also for its very citizens, who live lives of courage, creativity, internal discipline and felicity for which they are rewarded and praised. When Pericles reflects on democracy, he reflects on the character of the *polis* and its citizens. He reflects on their ethos. What is most pertinent to the argument of the thesis, though, is the way that Pericles utilises this ethos, the way he capitalises upon it, in order to achieve his goal of justifying the long-lasting war with Sparta. For this is indicative of the function that *metis* can have in a polity: the democrat grasps the opportunity provided by the

²⁴ Thucydides, 2.40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.43.

moment in order to sustain a case that he finds that will safeguard democracy. Pericles *dwells* in the moment, exploits it and makes it a moment of celebration of democracy. And he does so while using the ideal of the collective Athenian ethos.

This emphasis on the ethos of democratic life is also found in recorded sayings of the sophist Protagoras. To follow Protagoras's political thought we need to place him within the context of his political and social environment. To belong to the sophistic cast could involve various interpretations, since the term is used to refer to a wide range of men admired for their wisdom, from poets like Homer and Hesiod, to musicians and rhapsodes, to diviners and seers, as well as to the so called Presocratic philosophers.²⁶ What all these individuals share is the identity of the nomad intellectual, the enlightened person that moves between several places discussing, debating, teaching and generally displaying his innovative approaches to traditional ways of speaking and thinking.²⁷ Although there is a general agreement on the impossibility of considering sophists as a distinct school of philosophy still, according to Guthrie, there are some common traits among them.²⁸ They shared a certain skepticism and they were advocates of the subjective basis of human concerns, declaring that it is impossible to conclusively establish a concrete system of ethical codes which would regulate human conduct. Rather, based on their fundamental premise that laws and moral codes are not divine in origin but man-made and imperfect, they argued for the relativity of ethical values and for the absence of absolute values and standards. For the Sophists, experience is the only source of human action and thus the only source of judgment when it comes to defining the content of virtues and values. The founder of the sophistic movement, and the most prominent among its representatives, was Protagoras, who Plato has described -

²⁶ George Briscoe Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 24.

²⁷ Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff, *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xx.

²⁸ William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* (Harper Perennial, 1960), 71.

although not without a certain amount of Socratic irony - as “the wisest man alive”.²⁹

Protagoras was an outsider, a stranger to the city of Athens, but his multifarious character (he had a wide range of interests, extending to ethics, politics, theology, education, cultural history, literary criticism, linguistic studies and rhetoric)³⁰ attracted the interest and trust of prominent Athenians, Pericles among them. According to Diogenes Laertius, Protagoras was the first to institute contests in debating (*logon agonas*),³¹ thus creating a space where *arete* could be performed and revealed. For Protagoras pronounced that the content of *arete* cannot be known in advance, rather, it is context-dependent and subject to different interpretations and usages. He held that all opinions are true and he is also known for his belief that “man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not”, an opening aphorism for one of his works.³² No absolute knowledge is possible, since knowledge is always related to the knower. Experience, then, is projected by Protagoras as the source of any and every judgement. This acceptance of relativism in judgements guided also his rhetorical method, which was based on the assumption that for each question there are two sides opposed to each other, two *logoi* to be acclaimed for every issue (*dissoi logoi*). His proposal to solve the dilemma of which answer would then be the most valid was that the rhetor is responsible for determining which argument most closely achieves *orthon* in terms of having the greater probability of truth within a community of listeners.³³ He thus introduced the idea of considering *kairos* or the opportune time in debating,³⁴ a suggestion congruent with his teaching that our perception of things alters in accordance with our age or situation.

²⁹ Plato, *Protagoras*, 309d.

³⁰ Rosamond Kent Sprague (ed.), *The Older Sophists* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 3.

³¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), IX.52.

³² *Ibid.*, IX.51. See also Plato, *Theatetus*, 152a.

³³ Michael Carter, “Stasis and kairos: Principles of social construction in classical rhetoric” *Rhetoric Review* 7, no. 1 (1988), 103.

³⁴ We learn from Diogenes Laertius that “he was the first to emphasize the importance of seizing the right moment”, IX.52.

The Protagorean valuation of opinions was considered by Socrates as dangerous and he was the first who, according to Guthrie “sought to make ethics and politics the subject of a scientific inquiry which should reveal universal laws or truths, in opposition to the skepticism and relativism that had turned all things into matters of opinion and left men’s minds at the mercy of the persuader with the smoothest tongue”.³⁵ Socrates taught that, if justice, prudence and any other virtue are to have a meaning so as to be considered as “the right”, then there must be a common core, a common quality that renders all of them right and which constitutes the nature of rightness. The Platonic dialogue *Protagoras* is revealing for it represents this contest between two different approaches and worldviews. What is at stake in this dialogue is the teachability of *arete* and Protagoras, who values opinions, has a positive perspective on the issue whereas Socrates, who values knowledge, a negative one. By making a strong claim in favour of the teachability of *arete*, Protagoras actually makes a strong political claim in favour of democracy. More specifically, he claims that he teaches his student *politike technē* or “how he can best manage his own household and, concerning the affairs of the city, how he might be the most powerful in carrying out and speaking about the city’s affairs”.³⁶ That is, refuting Socrates, he teaches a person how he can be a good citizen. By using the Promethean *mythos*, and affirming the distribution among all human beings of two basic competences, that is *dike* and *aidos*, Protagoras makes a robust case for the possibility of democracy: men share some fundamental qualities and more specifically they are able to display civic qualities.

This view is further enhanced with the use of a *logos*, of an argument: if there are any cities to exist at all, then there must be some common trait shared by their members.³⁷ This shared quality is the Protagorean *arete*: it is the virtue of the good citizen which is not inherited but accessible to everybody and anybody. He finds a civic ethos lying in each and every citizen - acknowledging thus that every man is a political animal - an ethos that is an

³⁵ William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 425.

³⁶ Plato, *Protagoras*, 319a.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 324e.

achievement of the combination of social interaction among citizens and education. For Protagoras, *ethos* is the political disposition available to each citizen and that needs to be combined with political participation in order for man to fulfill his role in the *polis*. At the same time, the *polis* provides the web within which this civic *ethos* can be developed and acquire meaning.

It is because of the content and the quality of his political account of *arete* as presented in his Great Speech in the Platonic dialogue named after him, that Protagoras is considered as the first democratic theorist and as one who provides “an account of human nature and the nature of politics founded on the way in which actually man experienced his life in society”.³⁸ It is for the same reason that he is considered the thinker who has “produced for the first time in human history a theoretical basis for participatory democracy”.³⁹ His ideas about the validity of every and any opinion, about political excellence being attainable by every and any person and about the right to speak attributed to every and any citizen justify these characterisations. Protagoras claimed that this was made possible by the participation in any form of public debate, of *agon*, where at stake was not persuasion in order to reach consensus, but the discursive practice *per se*, the fact that each argument is contestable (*dissoi logoi*) and thus subject to valuation. But in this process every citizen had a — at least potential — value to contribute to debates concerning moral and political questions.⁴⁰

This profoundly democratic reading of the capacity of any citizen to be, as *echon logon*, and of the multiplicity of opinions (*doxa*) available to the public, their contestable nature notwithstanding, advances a conception of a democratic *ethos* that is both individualised and yet also always placed in the context of and in interaction with the *polis*. In Chapter Five I will discuss how Rancière, despite also attributing political virtue to any and every speaking being, fails to grasp *ethos* in its private dimension and focuses instead only on the encompassing and domesticating nature of the collective aspect of *ethos*. As Farrar has put it, Protagoras has a strong belief “in the beneficent

³⁸ Cynthia Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking: The Invention of Politics in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77.

³⁹ Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 144.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

socialising effect of *polis* life and democratic political action”.⁴¹ Man is prior to the city but he participates in *polis* and this experience makes him a citizen. It is the way in which man experiences his life as member of the Athenian democratic society and how this experience leads him to specific judgments about its prevailing values that are, according to Protagoras, the definitive factors in shaping a civil democratic ethos.

Protagoras proves important for the argument of the thesis because he transcends a bold dichotomy between the inner and outer dimension of ethos: it is not only that humans are capable of a civic ethos or that the polis carries a specific political character; it is also that these are in interaction and participate in the reformulation of the one by the other. His man-measure doctrine prompts us to guess that he valued practice more than theory. At the same time, Protagoras seems to introduce the idea of pluralism, for he values the existence of multiple opinions available to the public life and affirms the existence of different views in diverse places. More importantly, he affirms these opinions as being fluctuating and relevant to the *kairos*, to the circumstances, allowing us to interpret his idea in relation to *metis*. This is an argument that I revisit in the last chapter of the thesis. Pericles, as we have seen, provides us with a paradigm of *kairotic* action; whether this action was really undertaken in favour of democracy or this was merely a pretense is left to history to judge.

Aristotle on Democracy

Aristotle ventures a radically different approach to that of Protagoras and Pericles. In *Politics* he is engaged in a study of democracy as a way of searching for the best form of government, that is a government that would satisfy the criterion of mean, since moderation is the means to *eudaimonia*.⁴² Although Aristotle concurs with Pericles on the precedence of the *polis* over individuals, its necessity as the environment in which citizens develop and achieve prosperity, he is also interested in analysing in a systematic way every known political regime, in order to decide which one provides the best

⁴¹ Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking*, 76.

⁴² Aristotle, *Politics*, 1295a-b.

circumstances under which the individual can come to habitually perform ethical practices. That said, Aristotle's political thought does not begin and end with democracy; rather, he encounters it as one possible form of government among others. More specifically, he distinguishes between the true forms of government, that is those in which the one, or the few, or the many, govern with a view to the common interest, and their perversions, where governments rule with a view to the private interest, whether of the one or of the few or of the many.⁴³ Whereas royalty, aristocracy and constitutional government are considered true regimes, tyranny, oligarchy and democracy are their respective perversions. Democracy, then, in Aristotle's political thought is a degenerated type of regime.

This axiological degradation of democracy is related to the ultimate *telos* that this regime has: the satisfaction of the interests of the poor, which leads it to depart from the satisfaction of the general interest of the political community, which is Aristotle's prerequisite for a true regime. Aristotle describes in detail the elements common to the four different types of democracy he recognises, from the election of officers by and among all citizens by lot, to the ephemerality of all magistracies, and above all to the equal count of each member of the demos.⁴⁴ Freedom, interpreted on two levels, is the defining principle of democracy: on the first, everyone rules and is ruled in turn and on the second level everyone is able to live as he wishes.⁴⁵ Thus, the underlying principle for freedom is equality, but Aristotle is worried that the pursuit of equality might cause conflict and thus instability. This leads to the exclusion of poor citizens from possessing the highest offices: their role ought to be confined to participation in the assembly and to serve in the courts.⁴⁶ Equality is only possible among those who are similar to each other, that is among the members of the middle class, a class missing or at least lacking in number in a democracy.

In contrast to Pericles and Protagoras, Aristotle takes the side of theory, offering in a normative way an alternative type of political organisation that

⁴³ Ibid., 1279a.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1317b.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1317a-b.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1281b-1282a.

will avoid the grievances he attributes to the Athenian democracy. His mode of reflecting on democracy, that is from a strictly normative point of view, does not prevent him from developing a nuanced conception of a political ethos, as I have already discussed in the previous chapter. It remains to be seen in a following chapter how modern normative thinkers have attended to the topic and whether they have equally succeeded to remain sensitive to the need for involving ethos in their theorisations of democracy.

Participation and Virtue: Rousseau on Democracy

Reflecting on democracy in a normative way is a path taken also by Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, like Aristotle, is also critical of democracy, since he believes that it allows private interests to enter public affairs, and, he argues, is liable to civil wars and internal disturbance.⁴⁷ Rousseau considers the exercise of both the executive and the legislative power from the same body as dangerous and unproductive. In fact, he considers democracy as being so perfect a government, that he finds it suitable only for a divine society, if such a society were to exist.⁴⁸ However, it would be unfair to treat Rousseau's ideas as undemocratic: his commitment to individual freedom (or, better, to interpersonal dependency), his trust of human nature, its values and abilities, and the way that their reflection in governmental institutions can positively effect it, and above all the precedence he gave to a community attached to a common good, paved the way for a participatory democratic theory.⁴⁹

In his most famous work, *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau examines the formation of the political community describing it as the result of a contract between equal and free individuals who decide to exit the state of nature, that is a primitive state prior to society and its conventions, in order to confront impediments that endanger their survival. Upon their decision to exit this condition of freedom and equality, a problem emerges: how this association will protect the life and the property of all its members, while the

⁴⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book III, Ch.4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

latter will remain as free as before.⁵⁰ The question becomes even more crucial considering the fact that the health and smooth-running of the association demands that each person abolishes his individual rights and that he bestows them on the republic. The social contract is exactly the answer to this crucial issue for it gives birth to a new entity, a new moral and collective body, the body politic, called *republic* when passive, *sovereign* when active and *power* when compared with similar bodies. Citizens live close to each other, behaving in a virtuous way and with solidarity and being dependent on the totality of the political community. The republic's size is necessarily such "that it be neither too large to enable it to be well-governed, nor too small to enable it to maintain itself by itself",⁵¹ an idea that Rousseau seems to have taken from Machiavelli. The republic of Rousseau is founded on the idea of existence of a common good and in order for it to be preserved decision-making requires citizens' participation and is thus guided solely by the general will, people's own collective will, which is the only authority they are bound to, preventing then dependency upon individual others. The function of Rousseau's republic entails the existence of a specific collective ethos that is bestowed upon its citizens, of a common will that binds them and directs their decisions; this collective will is not just the sum of the separate persons' wills, but an infallible will that exists as a collective conscience.

In Rousseau's republic, political conflicts are to be minimised, so that every political process evolves harmoniously and unanimously. Even though strife is removed from the public field it is not totally erased; instead, it is moved in the individual himself, who now is able to become free from his natural inclinations and thus virtuous. As Connolly's insightful analysis of the *Social Contract* suggests, with Rousseau politics is interiorised and the self now becomes the field where the conflict between the forces of good and evil takes place: "Rousseau withdraws politics from the general will and relocates it quietly inside the selves which will these general laws".⁵² It can be argued that Rousseau, by way of seeking the harmony between the virtuous self -

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Ch. 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Book II, Ch. 9.

⁵² Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, 58.

and so an individual account of ethos - and the collective will of the law-making authority - a collective ethos - suppresses the issue of pluralism. This struggle for harmonisation inclines him to suggest that ideally in the republic there is no place for associations, factions and interest groups, for their separate wills and the struggle to impose it is in contrast to the unity of the general will and even puts its very existence in hazard.⁵³ Rousseau treats pluralism as a problem for his ideal republic: "there should be no factions in the State".⁵⁴ Even though he clearly affirms the role that diversity can play against inequality by stating that "if there are factions, it is necessary to multiply their number and prevent inequality...",⁵⁵ Rousseau is not willing to allow factions any political role. For he makes it clear that factions should not participate in the formation of the general will: their private interests can be harmful to the common good of the small sized, homogenous republic he aspires to by deceiving people and rendering the General Will a mere combination of opinions. Political participation in Rousseau's republic is limited to its individual virtuous citizens.

Rousseau's classical account of the ideal republic contributes to the corpus of democratic theory by drawing the line for a participatory democracy, the function of which depends on the virtuous behaviour of its citizens. It is the ethos of solidarity and dependency they explicate that conditions the preservation of the common good. Rousseau utilises a theoretical condition in order to make specific political suggestions. Although his treatment of the community as homogenous leaves little space for celebration of difference, his elaborations indicate the persistence in political life of the issue of ethos and its connection to the idea of a common good.

Madison: The Role of Pluralism in Modern Political Societies

The treatment of pluralism has been central in modern political thinkers. Some years after Rousseau what is considered as a pluralistic turn in democratic theory was articulated in the United States of America by James

⁵³ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II, Ch. 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Madison, one of its founding fathers and a principal author of the Constitution. Madison was a politician eager to provide a convincing solution regarding the best government suitable to a new extended American state. He explicates his ideas in a series of papers included in *The Federalist*, intended to make the case for the adoption of a Constitution and co-written with John Jay and Alexander Hamilton. More specifically, the problem to which his inquiries are directed is that of how to combine the preservation of the spirit and form of popular government, at the same time as securing the public good and private rights against any faction that would threaten them in order to satisfy its own interests and passions. According to Madison, public administrations in America laboured under a “factious spirit”, where faction is defined as “a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community”.⁵⁶ What Madison called “popular government”, or elsewhere a “pure democracy” was, he argued, unable to manage the misfortunes caused by an enhanced faction. The characteristics of such a regime, that is, the small number of citizens, facilitation of communication, as well as the fact that they actively participate to the decision making processes, are likely to enhance the development of common interests and passions among its members; however, the satisfaction of those interests may entail the sacrifice of a weak party or individual.⁵⁷

Sensibility towards the issue of factions, and therefore also to pluralism, leads Madison to suggest another type of government in the place of a “pure democracy”. For Madison, “[t]he latent causes of faction are (...) sown in the nature of man”,⁵⁸ which translates to the natural presence and thus inevitability of factions in human societies, despite their possible negative effects in case of them acquiring too much power. The best solution to confront the latter is, according to Madison, the establishment of a political

⁵⁶ James Madison, “The Federalist No. 10” in A. Hamilton, J. Madison, and J. Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

system which in function and extension will encourage the multiplication of interests and passions and thus of factions. That being the case, an elected government with members drawn from a large bank of candidates is less likely to sacrifice the interest of the country to temporary or partial issues. Two are the innovative clues here that are thought to lead to a non-oppressive ruling system: the size of the “extended republic” and the representative form of power exercise. With Madison, the foundations for the establishment of democracy in nation-states governed by an elected minority are well set.

Madison is a practical thinker, that is, one who bridges theory with practice. He is not concerned with models and imaginative conditions, but he is urged to find a solution to a predicament of the newly founded American state: that of pluralism. I treat his elaboration of democracy as classical here, because I believe that he makes available to us a discussion of democracy that is suitable to the modern circumstances, while at the same time treats one of the most pertinent issues of modernity, that of pluralism, with generosity: by actually asking for more pluralism. By doing so, Madison understands that modern political societies are bound by a common good that consists in the pluralisation of the interests of their citizens. It is the quest of this common good that transforms individuals into citizens.

The five thinkers examined in this section are considered as classical because their ideas about democracy and the terms they have used to describe it have shaped democratic discourse and practice until today. However, it would be inaccurate to claim that their texts form a single democratic theory, for each one of them has been the precursor of a distinct democratic tradition. For example, whereas in Pericles direct democracy is explicated as the absolute mode of political organisation, in Aristotle and Madison this model receives severe criticism. Also, Aristotle due to his insistence on the issue of equality as the necessary condition for the successful form of political organisation, is said to reflect the first socialist ideas.⁵⁹ Rousseau offers a formulation of a participatory model of democracy

⁵⁹ Such is the treatment of Aristotle by Hayek in F.A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism (The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek)*, ed. W.W. Bartley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

that is suitable to the modern social condition, since he puts on the agenda the issue of pluralism, even though he discusses it as a problem. With Madison two significant shifts occur: first, the democratic regime is assessed and transformed so that it might be appropriate for a nation state that is much larger than a city and so the model of representative democracy emerges; and second the idea of pluralism as a solution to the problem of fragmentation is introduced in the democratic discourse.

It is Protagoras who, over one thousand years before Madison, enunciates the doctrine of *dissoi logoi*, and hence introduces the idea of distinctiveness of each community, of each city and of each culture. Hence, he is the first to introduce pluralism and difference as something to be respected and yet confronted. He is also the first who succeeds in providing an alternative account of the relation of ethos to politics, introducing the idea of a civil democratic ethos that already refers to the very moment of political justification since it is connected with the citizen as *echon logon* and therefore as *being* in a specific way. His ethos oscillates between the public and the private poles, without being reducible to one of them. It is for this reason that the Protagorean account of ethos can be considered as the democratic account *par excellence*.

The important thing with these classical thinkers, I believe, is that they manage to transcend the rigid distinction between theory and practice. Despite they seem to suggest normative theses for the improvement of democracy, they do so inspired by the reality they experience. That is, I see them as blending the theoretical with the practical. Moreover, while they do so they conceive democracy as the quest of the common in a political society. This common is the ethos of democracy, the shared point of inspiration for every citizen. In their works, classical democratic theorists do not separate political reality from their reflections on the ideal form of political organisation; they use the former to inform and indeed improve the latter.

Thinkers in the post-war era neglected this mode of reflecting of democracy that seeks to bridge normative and practical ideas. As Sheldon Wolin has argued, the problem with the ideas of thinkers belonging in the classical period is not that they were too parochial to meet the needs of the extended

modern nation-state; rather, the real issue was that they were “strongly political”.⁶⁰ For what these thinkers actually did was to challenge and appraise the very limits of the terms that framed their investigations, such as citizen, participation, common will, public life, common good and equality. Reflecting on democracy for these thinkers meant very diverse things, from searching for ways to enhance a given political condition, as in the case of Pericles, to arguing in favor of a political transformation that ought to take place. Whatever the case, all these voices were informed by public concern, being in a way a response to a crisis, containing thus radical critiques of specific cases.⁶¹ However, what remains contestable, is the extent to which these changes to the discourse of democratic theory have led to its revitalisation or given to it yet more drawbacks. This is the question that the following section treats by way of turning to a mode of theorising democracy that has emerged during the 20th century.

III. Democracy as Ideology

In the twentieth-century political thought had to contend with the horror of totalitarianism and the destruction of politics. Political thinkers, in their vast majority, declaring themselves committed to liberal regimes, found themselves struggling to explain the dark events they were experiencing and to provide the optimum answer on what form can best serve the needs of modern political societies. Among the results that skepticism of this period has produced has been an immense yet heterogenous body of discourse regarding democracy. Political thinkers contributing to its production looked back to classical democratic theory, using it as a source of political terms and inspiration but mostly for condemnation, giving different interpretations of how democracy is to be understood and explained in relevance to social and economic factors. An attempt to give a solid answer to these problems was ventured by theorists who decided to use the comforts of modern social

⁶⁰ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 63.

⁶¹ Sheldon S. Wolin, “Political theory as a vocation” *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969), 1078-1080.

science to reveal the laws that govern the function of political societies. These theories show a definite tendency to separate analysis from norm, advancing the first while abandoning the latter, claiming to be value- neutral and considering democracy as an ideal position from which political analysis is to be held.

Carole Pateman has referred to this mode of engaging with democracy as the “contemporary theory of democracy”. It is the theory that “focuses on the operation of the democratic political system as a whole and is grounded in the facts of present-day political attitudes and behaviour as revealed by sociological investigation”.⁶² Danilo Zolo prefers to call it the “neo-classical doctrine of democracy”, to show how it is concerned ‘with accrediting as “purely descriptive” an image of the Western democracies which is essentially based on the desire to confirm the absolute superiority of that system’.⁶³ As such, the political system can be judged against a set of criteria, which ought to define whether the system is actually a democratic one. Most commonly accepted and used, though, is the term “revisionism”, a term coined to describe the distinct version of democratic theory that intends to challenge and revise the classical democratic doctrine inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries. Crawford Macpherson in his *Essay on Revisionist Liberalism* enunciates such a characterization for empirical theories which, despite claiming to be explanatory only are in effect justificatory as well.⁶⁴ Diverse in their approach and denomination of the phenomenon as these three thinkers may be, there is a common point they share: they all concur that it is the work of Joseph Schumpeter that paved the way for this new way of thinking of democracy.⁶⁵

Schumpeter’s classic work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942) is the product of its time. Placed in an exceptional political and economic environment it is, among other things, a response to the crisis of the

⁶² Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 13-14.

⁶³ Danilo Zolo, *Democracy and Complexity: A Realist Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 55.

⁶⁴ Crawford Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 77.

⁶⁵ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 3-6, Zolo, *Democracy and Complexity*, 89, Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, 78.

representational model of democracy advocated by those working in what he calls the classical doctrine of democracy. Schumpeter seeks to replace it with “another theory” of democracy that can constitute a realistic description of actual political life. Under the label of the former he places the work of the eighteenth-century philosophers, who appeal to democracy as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realises the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will”.⁶⁶ Schumpeter challenges the descriptive accuracy of classical democratic theory and unleashes a twofold critique against it, calling into question the very possibility of existence of a common good agreed upon by all people, on the one hand, and attacking the idea of the will of the people and therefore individuals’ nature as rational and responsible agent, on the other.

As far as the first line of critique is concerned, Schumpeter challenges the possibility of ever attaining a common good unanimously agreed upon by rational argumentation.⁶⁷ And even if an acceptable common good proved to be acceptable to all, it would never provide definite answers to individual cases. Therefore, he concludes, a common will or *volonte generale* that would realise the common good is unattainable. Schumpeter reinforces his conclusion by considering as insubstantial the hypothesis of rationality and effective volition of the individual, expressing pessimism over the abilities of the people: “the electoral mass is incapable of any action other than a stampede”⁶⁸. This assertion refers both to the private concerns of the family and business and to national and international issues. Since their sense of reality is reduced, Schumpeter claims, people have a reduced sense of responsibility and they are unable to formulate any judgement in matters of domestic and foreign policy.⁶⁹ And he concludes: “Thus the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the

⁶⁶ Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976, 250.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 251

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 283

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

political field [...] He becomes a primitive again”.⁷⁰ Politics is none of the business of the ordinary citizen.

However, the absence of effective volition among the people is only the one side of the coin called the crisis of representation. For this lack, along with the reduced sense of responsibility, is connected with the actual impact of democracy on people’s everyday lives. Schumpeter does not merely criticise the ignorant masses of citizens: he also stresses the inability of representative democracy itself to prescribe to its citizens in a specific and clear way what they should demand from their representatives. This abstraction, the argument has it, confuses citizens and renders their participation and even interest obscure. Despite plentiful information, representational democracy is unable to function because the communication between the political system and its citizen is poor.

Schumpeter’s suggestion of how to overcome the crisis of representation is to conceive of democracy as a mere method for arriving at decisions and therefore as “a steam engine or a disinfectant” instead of confusing it with its ends.⁷¹ To achieve this he suggests that the production of government is placed at the heart of democracy so that the latter is now to be conceived as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a *competitive struggle* for the people’s vote” (emphasis added).⁷² The specificity of Schumpeter’s democratic theory, then, lies in that he reverses the primacy of people’s role, from holding a definite and rational opinion about every issue to the election of the government. In doing so, Schumpeter emphasises competition for representation and thus he manages to suggest an alternative approach to democracy where (potential) continuous public contestation is at the heart of political life.

Another aspect of Schumpeter’s democratic theory is his economic interpretation of democracy. Schumpeter is considered the initiator of a whole new approach to democratic theory, based on his redefinition of democracy as having the form of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote, rendering

⁷⁰ Ibid., 262.

⁷¹ Ibid., 266.

⁷² Ibid., 269.

the behaviour of politicians similar to the competition of entrepreneurs for consumers' preference. This interpretation of democracy in terms of economic activity, aiming to "make it immune to mass movements and excessive popular participation, which are destructive forces any democracy ought to curb rather than encourage",⁷³ is today perceived as economic or elitist democratic theory. Not only does this theory deny a role to the individual citizen, by pronouncing her incapable of joining others in forming a common will, but it also forecloses the question of the common good in the political society. Along with it, it also remains blind to the ethotic dimension of democracy, since it insists on conceiving the latter from the point of economic interests rather than that of dispositions.

Following Schumpeter, many political theorists in the post-war United States accepted the critique of classical democratic theory and of the ideal of a *summum bonum* more specifically, sharing with him a pessimism over the capacity and accuracy of the classical doctrine of democracy and seeking instead to study democracy using scientific tools. What they found particularly problematic was the normative nature of the classical doctrine and they were instead committed to providing thorough empirical analyses of how things actually are. This mode of theorising flourished particularly during the decades of nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties and has had a great impact on the study of democracy, cultivating a growing interest on behalf of political scientists in research into human behaviour, political events and democratic processes in an empirical way. It has promised, as William Connolly has put it, 'to offer rigorous explanations with predictive power, anchored in observable facts in order to resolve differences between contending explanations and to avoid metaphysical speculations and the murky, "subjective" domain of value judgements'.⁷⁴ This was marked by a shift in the discourse used in the field, from terms such as state of nature, common good, sovereignty, natural law to decision-making, political system analysis, interest groups. A zealot of this approach justifies both its difference

⁷³ Emily Hauptmann, *Putting Choice Before Democracy: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 10.

⁷⁴ William E. Connolly, "Then and now: Participant- observation in political theory", in J. S. Dryzek, B. Honig, A. Phillips (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 827.

from classical political theory and its description as behavioural in the following compact argument:

Unlike the great traditional theories of past political thought, new theory tends to be analytic, not substantive, explanatory rather than ethical, more general and less particular. [...It] thereby links political science to broader behavioural tendencies in the social sciences; hence, its description as political behaviour.⁷⁵

Those who embrace the behavioural approach exorcise from their analyses concerns about how people *ought* to act. However they are not willing to completely leave aside the study of values, as “obviously important determinants of people’s behaviour”.⁷⁶ Still, they are dedicated to providing analyses of political facts which would be relevant to real political events, seeking to do so by “codify[ing] the operating characteristics of the democratic polity itself”.⁷⁷ What this approach introduces is the idea that democracy, in contrast with the classical doctrine, is already given in the form of a web of institutions, organisations and rules in which facts are taking place. The task of those studying politics, then, becomes the neutral observation of democratic life so as not to in any way interrupt it. Post-war “scientific” democratic theory, by separating norms and analysis closes the question of democracy and leaves the idea of the common good outside of democratic life.

Empirical researchers show little trust in the active participation of citizens in the democratic process, adopting Schumpeter’s assumption of the indifference (“apathy”) and/or ignorance of the people, their failure to deal effectively with political issues. They even conceive it as a factor that could lead the political system to instability, using examples from real political life

⁷⁵ David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 22.

⁷⁶ David Truman, “The implications of political behaviour research”, *Items*, Social Research Council, 1951, 37-39, cited in Robert Alan Dahl, “The behavioral approach in political science: Epitaph for a monument to a successful protest” *The American Political Science Review* 55, no. 4 (1961), 768.

⁷⁷ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 5 quoted in Quentin Skinner, “Empirical theorists of democracy and their critics: A plague on both their houses” *Political Theory* 1, no. 3 (1973), 295.

as evidence for their case.⁷⁸ The lack created in political life from the limited participation of the people, restricted to exercising their voting right, demonstrates the need for a well-qualified body of specialists, or elites, backed-up by strong institutions, who ought to deal with the realm of politics and the exercise of democracy. Giovanni Sartori, for example, has been rather reluctant to acknowledge active participation of the people as a vital characteristic of democracy, since it can threaten democracy itself by allowing undemocratic counter-elites to take power.⁷⁹ The fact that elites and not the ignorant masses compete for a place in leadership has resulted in this theory being called also the elitist theory of democracy.

This is exemplified in the work of Robert Dahl, who is often represented as one of the most influential, promising and formidable theorists of democracy, for advancing a participatory model of “polyarchal democracy” where government is exercised not by a majority or a minority but by a plurality of minorities. In his *Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956), Dahl appreciates the effectiveness of empirical study in democratic theory as “concerned with processes by which ordinary citizens exert a relatively high degree of control over leaders”.⁸⁰ Although Dahl believes that “theory tells us nothing about the real world”,⁸¹ he is reluctant to completely renounce it, since he recognises that it can help us not to get “totally lost in meaningless facts and trivial empiricism”.⁸² In this context, he chooses to offer an empirical theory of how a democracy - or polyarchy as he prefers to call it - can be established, backed up with a normative theory to preserve it. After engaging in a revision of two traditions of classical democratic theory, Madisonian and populist, he concludes that the method of setting a criterion which is then to be maximized is a mode of theorising that leads to utopianism and he proposes, instead, a descriptive method. According to the latter, he establishes eight

⁷⁸ A similar approach is taken by Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* and is further developed in Giovanni Sartori, *Democratic Theory* (New York: Wayne State University, 1962).

⁷⁹ Sartori, *Democratic Theory*, 119.

⁸⁰ Robert Alan Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago, : Chicago University Press, 2006 (1956), expanded edition), 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 84.

conditions that characterise a polyarchy, but rather than viewing them as goals to be realised, he uses them as constants against which real democratic conditions can be measured.⁸³

Following Dahl's line of thought, that is, by classifying and studying a considerable number of real world organisations, it is possible to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence and flourishing of a polyarchy. And even though only a limited number of citizens participate in political procedures, the pluralist system is a reality and its existence is secured by the fact that diverse minorities representing different social groupings express a consensus over the policies followed in elections: "minorities rule".⁸⁴ The presentation of democracy as a polyarchical system, that is, as a system in which multiple minorities struggle for attaining power, paved the way for another mode of thinking democracy in the context of descriptive theory, that of pluralism, which aspires to remedy Schumpeter's vacuum between the individual citizen and the elected leadership.⁸⁵ With Dahl, competition of interests comes to the fore of democratic theory and the contest between competing groups is elevated to the prime element of the democratic system.

Descriptive approaches to democratic theory claim to be innovative as a way of avoiding the abstraction and generalisation of normative approaches. This "mood", as Dahl describes it, is shared by those who have a sympathy toward "scientific" modes of investigation and analysis,⁸⁶ a trend that has given rise to the idea that democracy ought to be studied and tested like any other phenomenon examined by social sciences like sociology and psychology and thus by borrowing concepts and methods from them, in order to achieve the coveted objectivity. In the context of this neo-empiricism,

⁸³ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 132-3.

⁸⁵ David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008 (3rd edition), 158.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 766. Beyond characterising it as a mood, a harsh debate has been taking place regarding the characterization of behaviouralism as a revolution, see for example James Farr, "Remembering the revolution: Behaviouralism in American political science", in J. Farr, J. Dryzek, S. Leonard (eds.), *Political Science in History: Research Programs and Political Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 198-224, Wolin, "Political theory as a vocation", Skinner, "Empirical theorists of democracy and their critics", John Gunnell, "The real revolution in political science" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 1 (2004), 47-50.



political theorists⁸⁷ have developed - or rather borrowed from other sciences - methods of examining democracy as an empirically testable phenomenon, aspiring to describe "what democracies really are in the real world",⁸⁸ that is by providing precise descriptions of specific aspects of the political activity developed by the responsible rational agent. Among the most popular descriptive approaches are system theories, the public choice school, decision-making theory and the economic theories of politics. These focus on the study of the voting behaviour of legislatures, public opinion measurement, party competition and calculation of election outcomes. Scholars driven by scientific aspirations do not abandon normative concepts, but for the fear of them being too opaque, abstract and puzzling, they restrict their use to mere reference without clarification, while preference is shown for finding the way to give precedence to democratic institutions and electoral processes.⁸⁹ The common denominator of these political theorists is that intrinsic values can be objective and universal thus they can be somehow measured and verified.

As early as the 1960s such empiricism became the target of attack from various sides, not to mention the disentanglement from it of some of its major previous supporters.⁹⁰ A commonly repeated argument developed in the context of this attack is one with two branches: on the one hand, that even these inquiries have normative implications and, on the other, that behind

⁸⁷ During this period many behaviouralists considered themselves as political theorists, for example see Emily Hauptmann, "A local history of the political" *Political Theory* 32, no.1 (2004), 40. Carole Pateman refers to them as "political sociologists wearing the hat of a political theorist", in *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 3.

⁸⁸ Gianni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited Part I: The Contemporary Debate* (Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, 1987), xii.

⁸⁹ See for example David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (New York: Knopf, 1963), Antony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), Charles F. Cnudde and Deane E. Neubauer (eds), *Empirical Democratic Theory* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1969), Melvin Hinich and Michael Munger (eds), *Empirical Studies in Comparative Politics* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Electoral Systems and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). For a critical detailed review of neo-empiricism see also Danilo Zolo, *Democracy and Complexity: A Realist Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 19-45.

⁹⁰ See for example Robert Alan Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

their pseudo-scientism they hide a profound conservatism.⁹¹ Practitioners of descriptive accounts of democratic theory claim to achieve an analysis that unlike the classical democratic doctrine is much closer to political reality; it does so, they claim, by avoiding to aspire to an ideal polity and by invoking, instead, questions concerning the best way to ensure stability and cohesion of the democratic system. This, however, entails a serious shift in theory's normative foundations: by revising theory to bring it closer to reality, these theorists have transformed democracy from a radical political doctrine based on popular participation into a conservative one.⁹² Democracy is now justified in an ideological spirit, which more specifically is painted with the colour of conservatism.

According to another line of critique, this time targeting the much celebrated neutrality of descriptive theory, it is suggested that the attempt at objectivity presupposes the existence of an external viewer, a contemplator who stands out and above of the phenomena and does not participate in them. But this presumption overlooks the fact that the behaviouralist is always working within a perspective forced upon him by the need to defend his economic or cultural interests.⁹³ Another argument suggests that the idea implicit in the "scientific" approach to politics that the political field is clearly separated from the social, the economic and the aesthetic and thus can be explained using scientific methods and models, is oversimplifying.

Furthermore, even more worrying is the assumption that behaviouralism, by showing distrust of citizens *qua* human beings, in fact does not provide legitimation for democracy at all. This suspicion is enhanced considering the approach of democracy as a mere method, a way for a political system to be. A specific conception of choice is at the core of the work of theorists in the school of thought that Schumpeter inaugurated. More specifically, these theorists elevate the chance to choose into a central element of democracy as they seek to redefine it, celebrating individual choice as the ultimate democratic moment. This entails the confinement of participation to the

⁹¹ For a presentation and refutation of these arguments see Skinner, "Empirical theorists of democracy and their critics".

⁹² Jack L. Walker, "A critique of the elitist theory of democracy" *The American Political Science Review* 60, no. 2 (1966), 288.

⁹³ Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, 12.

moment of election, with choice functioning at the same time as a value realised by democracy and as something that can potentially be distorted by it. However, the fact of the shift of interest from broad participation to choice and the alteration of the language used to describe the value of democracy, results in the need of justifying it anew - that is to provide a justification of what is valuable about a democratic system, even one deflated to a mere method. But, as Emily Hauptmann shows in her analysis of Athenian democracy, the value of individual choice is neither necessary nor sufficient for a justification of democracy.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the notion of choice as elaborated by those espousing a descriptive account of democracy, is too broad and paradoxical to “support the weight of both a critique and a justification of democracy by itself”.⁹⁵ And she concludes: “the critical standards rational choice theorists use to recast democratic politics contain no basic commitment to democracy. The value of democracy cannot be reduced to the value of honouring individual choice”.⁹⁶

If these critiques of behaviouralism are defensible and vital, then an issue arises with regard to how to respond to this mode of theorising, so that democracy is neither deflated nor confused with its values. A certain type of response is offered by those who come to the aid of classical democratic theory like Leo Strauss, a committed scholar of political philosophy. Strauss has been rather ironic with the “scientific” political science that “conceives of itself as *the* way towards genuine knowledge of political things”.⁹⁷ He has bitterly criticized positivism in social sciences, both by insisting on the impossibility of a “value-free” political science and by rejecting the depreciation of scientific knowledge that the latter implies and he has accused it of conformism and philistinism.⁹⁸ To the charges of behaviouralists against political philosophy for being value-laden and thus inefficient when it comes to producing objective, scientific knowledge, Strauss declared that the

⁹⁴ Emily Hauptmann, *Putting Choice Before Democracy*, Ch. 3

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁷ Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 13.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

aim of political philosophy is to “replace opinions about the political fundamentals by knowledge regarding them”.⁹⁹ However, complete renunciation of empiricism denudes democratic theory from a promising ally in the battle against those who blame democracy for all kinds of misfortunes. What is needed, is a more moderate approach that can possibly combine the benefits of classical democratic ideas with the comforts of description, a thesis that I will try to develop in the remainder of the chapter.

To start with, Sheldon Wolin has offered such a voice, by arguing in favour of a more responsive and generous frame of critique against it, aspiring to exploit the most from it.¹⁰⁰ Wolin is more receptive to the changes brought to the field by positivist approaches and he recognizes that whatever one’s assessment of the “behavioural revolution”, it clearly has succeeded in transforming political science.¹⁰¹ Wolin himself claims to be more anxious about the fact that behaviouralism assumes that something is political, rather than struggling to define it, and thus he has been more interested in revealing the slippages of what, in his classic article “Political theory as a vocation”, he defines as “methodism”. In this context, he has criticised the *vita methodica* that empirical political science entails, for fostering the specific “regularities that reflect the main patterns of behaviour which society is seeking to promote and maintain”,¹⁰² favouring instead the idea of *bios theoretikos*. For Wolin, behaviouralism has never been a revolutionary approach, being deficient in terms of innovation compared to the task of the “epic theorist”. In celebrating the uniqueness of political theory as a mode of inquiry, Wolin gives prominence to the generosity of spirit.

Wolin’s article appeared in a period when empiricism in political studies had already started to fade, with some of its most fervent supporters envisaging a new revolution, this time a post-behavioural one, that would challenge the conversion of politics into the subject matter of a scientific

⁹⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁰ John H. Schaar and Sheldon S. Wolin, “Review: Essays on the scientific study of politics: A critique” *American Political Science Review* 57, no. 1 (1963), 125-150. Connolly even refers to a “bracketed behaviouralism” on behalf of Wolin, see William E. Connolly, “Politics and vision” in A. Botwinick and W. E. Connolly (eds.), *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9.

¹⁰¹ Wolin, 1062.

¹⁰² Ibid., 1064.

method. David Easton, who introduced this new “movement and intellectual tendency” with an article in the influential *American Political Science Review*, expressed his disappointment with regard to behaviouralism’s drift “to convert the study of politics into a more rigorously scientific discipline modeled on the methodology of natural sciences”.¹⁰³ Easton hoped that post-behaviouralism would respond better to the need felt by some theorists of the time for translating tacit political knowledge into action. In his own words, aiming to give “immediate answers to immediate problems”, “[t]his kind of shift in disciplinary focus will call urgently for the systematic examination of the tasks involved in transforming our limited knowledge today into a form far more consumable for purposes of political action”.¹⁰⁴

Notwithstanding the different points of departure and dispositions of their writers, these articles share an agony regarding the actual relationship between political knowledge and political reality, the role and impact that the discipline can or ought to have in political life. For Sheldon Wolin, the world is impervious to theory and facts could never prove the validity of a true theory, since they are “less close to truth than [is] thought”.¹⁰⁵ However Wolin, as I read him, concurs with Easton on the importance of bringing to the fore the issue of the relationship of theory to practice, a position recapitulated and epitomised in his article’s title, which aims to raise a voice of “warning and pain” in favour of the task of the theorist, who is nonetheless always already positioned against the facts in a particular way.

From another angle, William Connolly chose a different way to question the neutral, instrumental or value-free accounts which empiricists claim to offer. He challenged the very dichotomy between descriptive and normative concepts, arguing that concepts that are of paramount significance in the study of politics are constructed from a normative point of view.¹⁰⁶ Normative concepts are supposed to combine specific actions, such as commending, with a descriptive content that may vary (for example “good”), whereas

¹⁰³ David Easton, “The new revolution in political science” *American Political Science Review* 63, no.4 (1969), 1051.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1056.

¹⁰⁵ Wolin, “Political theory as a vocation”, 1081.

¹⁰⁶ Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*.

descriptive ones are understood to combine variable functions with a single criterion or a small set of criteria (for example “yellow”). According to Connolly, this dichotomy cannot be sustained due to the fact that even though many concepts are formed through normative considerations, limiting our attention to them would entail a loss as to how to clarify or redefine their boundaries when new and unforeseen situations arose.¹⁰⁷ If we are to have a clear understanding of political concepts, such as democracy, we need to appreciate the relation between their normative point and the criteria of describing these concepts as such and not as another thing; that is, we need to attend to the complexity of the normative-descriptive scheme.

In view of these criticisms and suggestions, a question becomes pertinent here: what has the theorising endeavour - and under which circumstances - to offer to democracy? To rephrase this, does democracy need the theorising endeavour? Despite the fact that there is no definite answer to this question, it can be argued that an approach that aspires only to provide a realistic description of political life is too narrow to offer anything to democracy. Dahl, for example, puts the elections at the centre of the democratic process, and then he theorises the latter as a polyarchal system with internal stable rules that can be objectively examined by an external analyst, who then can determine a quantitative model which can provide information about the past and predictions about the future. Democracy, then, is an observable phenomenon which does not need any external intervention to work; in addition, this view does not necessarily associate an increase in participation with positive developments. In this mode of theorising-as-objectifying democracy, the latter becomes understandable only as a method, a mechanism that makes the political field conceivable in ways that are measurable and assessable. It is a mode that lacks complexity and inclusiveness and thus it is doomed to overlook other important questions, like what is the very essence of democracy for the thinkers who seek to theorise it, how democracy is connected with subjectivity and procedures of subjectivisation, and most importantly, what is the connection between democracy and the enterprise of theorising. Moreover, it fails to grasp any aspect of democracy that is related to the individual and the dispositions that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 29.

she carries as a creator and bearer of democratic practices; that is, it fails to grasp the ethotic dimension of democracy that is connected to mobilisation and motivation of citizens. But mainly, the view that chooses to strictly separate norms from and analysis and to exclude the former from the process of studying political life, in fact closes the question of democracy. It adopts it as an ideological construction that can be used to measure and analyse political life and it therefore abandons the importance of the question of the common good that traditional democratic thinkers have already grasped.

On the other hand, yet equally inadequate, is an approach that sets at the heart of democracy a moral purpose. Classical democratic theory, but also current normative theory as will be discussed in Chapter Three, is of this kind, in that it prescribes a higher aim for democracy, that is the full moral development of individual's capacities *qua* the educated citizen, so that a free genuine community can be formed. It also sets the general strategy for the fulfillment of this aim, which is political activity through the pursuit of the common good.¹⁰⁸ In this view, it becomes susceptible to much of elitist theorists' criticisms. That is, it becomes an ethical goal that is dubious and subject to challenge and opposition. However, considering normative theory's irreducible value in transcending political reality and imagining a better possible condition, it would be a mistake to renounce it in favour of a plain descriptive approach. If description deflates democracy to a mere procedure, and explanation reduces it to a moral claim, then both should be only taken as a means to facilitate democratic strategy and not as a criterion of judgement.¹⁰⁹ The separation between the idea and its application, the norm and its description, theory and practice, does not offer anything to democracy: each of these constituents is in tension with the other. The question is how this tension is better maintained.

¹⁰⁸ Lane Davis, "The cost of realism: Contemporary restatements of democracy" *The Western Political Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1964), 43-44.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

IV. Interlude: Which Theory for Democracy?

A main goal of this thesis is to bring this question to the fore. And a main argument is that this might be possible by looking at the connections between democracy and ethos. In this chapter I have tried to set the foundations to this argument by scrutinising how the endeavour of theorising democracy entails an investigation into ethos. More specifically, I have discussed how the bold separation between norm and description in democratic theory has rendered the latter blind to the issue of ethos. I have opened the discussion by attending to five classical thinkers of democracy. Since I find that in their elaborations they do not treat political reality as separate from or external to their reflections on political life, I have suggested that they all view democracy as concerned with what is common to individuals in a political community, inspiring and mobilising them, and thus elevating them to citizens. To be sure, I have introduced the argument that the common to which classical democratic thinkers aspire is a kind of disposition, an ethos of democracy. I have, then, turned to modern descriptive democratic thought and explicated why it is unable to grasp this question of the common.

By way of introducing my analysis, I have already examined the tension between theory and practice in the tradition, suggesting that while the ancients favoured the former, in modernity two different approaches took place: the precedence of practice and the effort to reconcile these two components. Last, I have argued that it is only with Nietzsche that this reconciliation is attained, for he is the one who calls us to see that they are indeed inseparable. This is the stance that I also endorse in the thesis.

I agree with William Connolly that, despite their ambitions, empirical democratic theorists are unable to provide a democratic model free from normative considerations, since these are already present when defining the questions asked in empirical inquiry. Moreover, I share Carole Pateman's agony that an elitist approach overlooks the importance of ordinary citizens' participation in democracy. I concur, at last, with Sheldon Wolin who behind the highly defended neutrality of behaviouralism describes a fear of fundamental change, and thus a conservatism, and a lack of commitment.

What I want to add to these anxieties, fears and observations is what I find also problematic with this kind of democratic theory: a jejune and one-dimensional theorisation of democracy. The failure to provide a view of democracy other than as a method, leads these theorists to overlook the possible edifying procedures of the theorising endeavour for democracy itself. Moreover, and despite the fact that behaviouralists try hard to provide us with a well-informed and specific relation between theory and practice, I believe that their anxiety to avoid what they consider the fallacies of classical democratic theory leads them to defend a sterilised notion of democracy, one in which there is no space for any passion, emotion or creative action on behalf of individuals.

Without intending to exaggerate the possible role of theory, and thus avoiding what Connolly calls “the hubris of theory”, I want to argue in favour of a more active role for theory in the shaping of democracy, which is considered as something more than a set of procedures. Connolly worries about the importance placed on theory - but on explanation and interpretation as well - and their ability to certainty and sufficiency and he suggests that perhaps we could engage in theory in a more open manner, since what is presented as unambiguous and clear-cut, absolute and sufficient, well-defined and thus finalized by theory, in fact is just a choice of the theorist who decides to close the subject against any new possibilities for its evolution. The reason that this openness could be a possible approach is that, in his own distinctive terminology, “[the] world is too complexly intermeshed to fit the strictures of either law-like explanation or deep interpretation”.¹¹⁰ It is characteristic that in parallel with the detachment of former advocates of behaviouralism from it, voices have been raised calling for less meta-theoretical reflections and more political theory in practice, that is “attention to the political realm” and “to the realities, actual and developing”.¹¹¹ I believe this is indicative of the trend for recent political theorists to become more reluctant to renounce completely empiricism and they have stressed the

¹¹⁰ Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 16. Connolly himself aims to suggest a modesty that each theorists should show for other theorists' approaches.

¹¹¹ Here I have in mind Tracy Strong's note as an editor in one of the most important journals of political theory, *Political Theory* 18, no.1 (1990), 4-5.

importance of appreciating the productive outcome of the inescapable fusion of empirical with normative presuppositions.¹¹²

Wendy Brown offers such an approach of openness in theory when she makes a statement on a pressure that is exercised on theory today, a pressure which must be resisted.¹¹³ This pressure, which demands for theory to be accurate and applicable, to solve problems and to unmask the truth, distorts theory itself and needs to be resisted. Brown prefers to see theory as a meaning-making enterprise instead of the contemplation of the supposed real and true, as a mechanism of production of new representations and not as accurate description of an existing reality. As she puts it, “insofar as theory imbues contingent or unconscious events, phenomena, or formations with meaning and with location in a world of theoretical meaning, theory is a sense-making enterprise of that which often makes no sense, of that which may be inchoate, unsystematized, inarticulate.”¹¹⁴ *Contra* Aristotle, theory is not the end.

This is the kind of theory that I want to demonstrate in the thesis, a theory that opens up the space for dispositions and sensibilities and thus the element of ethos. Such a democratic theory is not just a theory of democracy: it is itself in effect democratic and so engaging democratic theory entails thinking in democratic ways, being subject to challenge from argument and from evidence. It is a theory that appreciates but does not evaluate, the theory that is part of the world and does not stand above it and which world it does not wish to decipher but to rearrange, in order to allow space for every possibility to reveal itself. It is thus a theory that opens what Brown calls “a breathing space between the world of common meanings and the world of alternative ones”.¹¹⁵ As early as 1969, Wolin had summarised this by saying that the task of theorist is not just to change “men’s views of the world”, but the world itself.¹¹⁶ I believe this is both pertinent and desirable

¹¹² Ian Shapiro, “Problems, methods and theories in the study of politics, or what’s wrong with political science and what to do about it” *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002), 599.

¹¹³ Wendy Brown, “At the Edge” *Political Theory* 30, no 4. (2002), 573.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 574.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 574.

¹¹⁶ Wolin, “Political theory as a vocation”, 1080.

today since, as another thinker has put it, the ideal, the theoretical is always present in empirical work.¹¹⁷ This is why it is a theory of creativity and imagination.

This chapter explored various articulations of theorising democracy. In the beginning, we saw how political thought is characterised by a persistent binary between norm and description. It is part of the argument of the thesis that such a binary is not suitable when theorising democracy, for it obscures the way in which the tension between theory and practice can inform our understanding of democracy. In Section II I scrutinised five democratic thinkers who I see as examples of overcoming this binary; I suggested that they all achieve to discuss democracy without contending that they are on a normative standpoint and while they take practical issues into consideration. At the same time, these thinkers attend to democracy as addressing the quest of the common between the members of a polity, showing how the question of ethos is embedded in it. I continued by arguing that descriptive democratic thought fails to grasp these questions (of the common and ethos), because it understands democracy only as a method. I concluded that creativity is inextricably connected with the task of theorising democracy. Having suggested that taking the stand of description blinds us with regard to ethos and the essence of democracy, I now turn to three thinkers who take the stand of norm. As my discussion in the next chapter reveals, despite these thinkers unavoidably need ethos to fill in the gap in their theories (a gap created by the need to suggest what is the bond that unites the citizens of the polities they envision), it is an ethos that is pre-political because it is argued for from a moral point of view. This is why in Chapters Four and Five I turn to agonism and see how its effort to transcend moral questions results to a more successful articulation of ethos and of the common good.

¹¹⁷ Anne Norton, *95 Theses on Politics, Culture and Method* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 136.



Chapter 3

Normative Responses in Democratic Theory

Normative responses to post-war “scientific” democratic theory were beginning to be articulated in the late 1960s. However, the autocracy of the revisionist model was not seriously challenged until 1971, when John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* appeared, signaling the return of a paradigm that, since the nineteenth-century, seemed to have sunk into lethargy. Since then the corpus of knowledge of democracy has been significantly enriched with new approaches, methods and criticisms, resulting in the emergence of a debate that is commonly said to take place between advocates of liberal and communitarian accounts of democracy, some aspects of which are critically assessed in the present chapter. Although this debate does not explicitly treat the question of ethos, in this chapter I present a reading which shows how key participants in that debate in fact rely upon a conception of ethos in their discussion of democracy. But their failure to theorise ethos directly, explicitly and comprehensively, I argue, leads also to their failure to grasp democracy as anything other than as a regime and therefore an inability to understand and assess it in its experiential dimension. Although these thinkers aspire to a kind of ethos they, ultimately, connect democracy only to morality.

To begin with, for some commentators, the debate between Liberals and Communitarians has been structured around rationality and the possibility of democracy being geared toward achieving the general will that reflects the common good. The literature developed by those skeptical about this possibility may be characterised as ‘aggregationist’, represented by those in the descriptivist mode of democratic theorising; the approach of those for whom we may trust deliberation as a means to get people to converge on the common good is characterised as ‘deliberative’.¹ An alternative perspective, suggests the characterisations ‘aggregationist’ and ‘accommodationist’. Where the first of these emphasises the rational and independent character of moral agents in making decisions and choices, favouring thus liberal constitutional democracy as the regime that best allows the effective

¹ Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

aggregation of individual interests, the second refuses to regard persons as being independent from the particular communities in which they are embedded. Since these communities are considered as highly important to individuals' orientation in life, accommodationist conceptions of democracy advocate a state that does not privilege any particular stance over others.²

Political theory is not biology and theories do not belong to taxonomies as species do. Boundaries between models are blurred and classifications can only be used as compasses and under no circumstances as ultimate matrices; this is exactly what makes political theory an interesting field of enquiry. There certainly are trends, currents and orientations in democratic theory, but they are not exhaustive of the relevant literature. As theorists alter their minds and views of the world, ideas are transformed and theories move from one quarter to the other. John Rawls, for example, might be considered as an aggregationist, but not after his deliberative turn in the 1990s. Furthermore, there are theorists that fit into neither of the models/ categories described above, since their work introduces more radical ideas that challenge the terms under which these debates are conducted.

The argument that this chapter introduces is that the three thinkers chosen to be discussed here, John Rawls, Charles Taylor and Iris Marion Young, all respond to the theorists of the aggregative mode, aiming to prove the shortcomings of this mode and to restore the moral dimension of Liberalism. They do so by replicating an issue suspended in the form of denial by post-war descriptive theorists - the question of the common good and its role in democracy.

The chapter argues that these theorists respond to the proponents of the aggregative model by first of all giving an affirmative answer to the question of the attainability of a common good. The way these normative thinkers revive the idea of a common good is crucial for the way that they address the issue of pluralism - each of them in a different yet, I shall argue, non-political way. Furthermore, they all raise as implicit in the discussion around and about democracy the issue of ethos, despite using disparate terms to articulate it. More specifically, the chapter argues that terms such as 'sense

² Here I follow the categorisation and generally the rationale outlined in Alan Finlayson, "Rhetoric and radical democratic political theory", in Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (eds.), *The Politics of Radical Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 15-16.

of justice', 'civic patriotism' or 'differentiated solidarity' coined by Rawls, Taylor and Young respectively, are used in order to describe the common bond among the citizens of a modern pluralist state that safeguards the polity's democratic function. Each of these thinkers, then, appeals to ethos to respond to the descriptive critique of the idea of the common good and to offer an account of the bond that keeps the citizens of a polity together. I will explore the evolution of these terms in the work of each theorist, highlighting the role it has in their conception of democracy. I will also critically discuss how these conceptualisations of ethos fail to provide an adequate understanding of democratic life, since they are based on a moral rather than political approach of the bond that unites citizens.

Overall, the chapter argues that by appealing to a moralised conception of ethos, the three theorists discussed here fail to provide a political negotiation of the issue of pluralism and they eventually treat political life as grounded in a higher direction. As such, not only do Rawls, Taylor and Young fall for a moralisation of political life but they also fail to attend to the tactical dimension of ethos and give precedence to only one or the other of its components, that is either the private, or the public. As I argue in the thesis, though, a democratic ethos can be conceived only when it is affirmed as the interplay of these two poles, so that its dual tactical dimension (as something that needs to be cultivated through tactics and at the same time as something performed through tactics on the moment of democratic action) is exposed.

I. The Democratic Thought of John Rawls: The Ethos of Justice

When John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* appeared in 1971 it was welcomed as the prime mover for the turn from scientific to normative philosophy; but perhaps even more importantly it signaled a moment for revival for a discipline that until then seemed unable to escape the powerful predominance of empirical oriented modes of research. The wide positive reception of this work is attributed to its combination of 'a normative and "principled" system of thought using the highly technical methods of

analytical philosophy, a contractualist reading of the Anglo-American tradition of liberal thought and a “progressive” justification of egalitarian social justice’.³ By succeeding in adopting the logical rigour and the technically sophisticated style of analytical philosophers without, though, overlooking the idea that questions about what is just and unjust have a substantive character and thus require ‘thick’ answers, Rawls managed to move away from skepticism about rationality in ethics, and therefore in politics.⁴ Another commentator stresses the fact that Rawls’s analysis does not just depend on social sciences, but it also holds the promise of cross-fertilising and enriching them.⁵ Importantly, Rawls revived political philosophy as a discipline by enabling it “to stop seeing [itself] as purely (or at least primarily) descriptive approach; [it] could now claim an active role in the discussion and resolution of public problems”.⁶ Since then, each work produced by Rawls has been received as classic, including his *Political Liberalism*, as well as numerous articles in some of the most well-established academic journals.⁷

His indisputable contribution to the field of political theory and to liberalism more particularly notwithstanding, there is considerable controversy over attributing to Rawls the status of a theorist of democracy. More specifically, numerous thinkers find that Rawls fails exactly when the issue of democracy is at stake and this is highly relevant to his understanding of politics. Sheldon Wolin, for example, problematises Rawls’s approach to politics as a ‘settlement’, arguing that “Rawlsian democracy might be likened to a hermetically sealed condition of deliberation that allows rationality to rule by suppressing certain topics and historical grievances and excluding diverse

³ Cecile Laborde, “The reception of John Rawls in Europe” *European Journal of Political Theory* 1, no 2 (2002), 135.

⁴ Stuart Hampshire, “A special supplement: A new philosophy of the just society” *New York Review of Books* 18, no 3, (1972). Retrieved from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/10296>.

⁵ Norman Daniels, “Introduction”, in Norman Daniels (ed.), *Reading Rawls: Critical Studies on Rawls’ ‘A Theory of Justice’* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), xxxiii.

⁶ Alexander Nehamas, “Trends in recent american philosophy” *Daedalus* 126, no 1, (1997), 217.

⁷ See for example John Rawls, “Justice as fairness: Political not metaphysical” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1985); John Rawls, “The idea of an overlapping consensus” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, no. 1 (1987); John Rawls, “The priority of right and ideas of good” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17, no. 4 (1988).

languages of protest from public councils”.⁸ Chantal Mouffe expresses worries that Rawls’ s Kantian liberalism fails to recognise the nature of the political, overloads the field of politics with morality and despite his efforts to reconcile democracy and liberalism, at the end he privileges the latter over the former.⁹ For Bonnie Honig, Rawls engages in a virtue political theory that favours a formulation of a political economy untroubled by politics where it is possible and desirable to exclude remainders, a formulation that entails “antidemocratic resonances, if by democracy one means a set of arrangements that perpetually generates popular (both local and global) political action as well as generating practices that legitimate democratic institutions”.¹⁰ Rawls’s democracy is perceived by his colleagues as being too narrow, sterilised or overflowed by the liberal ideal.

For others, though, Rawls despite not addressing democracy directly, at least in the *Theory of Justice*, actually contributes to democratic thought. Joshua Cohen, for example, argues that Rawls’ s use of a democratic constitutional regime and a democratic society as the basis of his work re-introduces the crucial element of justice to democratic theory. In doing so he recognises that “[t]hough justice as fairness is not a theory of democracy and says little about the processes of democratic politics, it is a contribution to democratic thought.”¹¹ In a similar vein, Amy Gutmann reads Rawls’s as identifying democracy with equal democratic liberty, managing to bridge liberalism and democracy in an intimate marriage.¹² Both Cohen and Gutmann concur that Rawls makes a significant contribution to democratic thought, by suggesting not specific procedures and processes but the normative framework in which democratic institutions are justified.

⁸ Sheldon S. Wolin, “The liberal/ democratic divide: On Rawls’ s *Political Liberalism*” *Political Theory* 24, no. 1, (1996), 102.

⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 80-105.

¹⁰ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

¹¹ Joshua Cohen, “For a democratic society”, in Samuel Freeman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87.

¹² Amy Gutmann, “Rawls on the Relationship between Liberalism and Democracy”, Samuel Freeman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 168-199

The present section attends to Rawls's original intention and thus reads his work as aspiring to move within the field of democratic theory. To be sure, Rawls himself expressed the hope "that justice as fairness will seem reasonable and useful [...] in a wide range of thoughtful political opinions and thereby express an essential part of the common core of the democratic tradition".¹³ The section, then, offers an affirmative reading of Rawls's political philosophy and particularly of his account of democracy, and it suggests that his enquiries offer a certain vision of democracy, that is a specific democratic theory by way of deploying his theory of public political culture. More specifically, the section argues that Rawls deploys the theory of public political culture to suggest that the common good for a democratic society is the product of its citizens. The following analysis shows how Rawls relies on his theory of public political culture in order to reach a conception of justice that is suitable for securing social cooperation between citizens who are free and equal, yet divided due to having adopted different comprehensive doctrines. With the issue of pluralism being inherent in his democratic theory, Rawls needs an ethos to treat the problem of common good in his political society. The section suggests that it is exactly his reliance on ethos — with the specific traits he attributes to it — that renders Rawls's democratic theory susceptible to criticisms such as those previously presented. Despite his intentions, Rawls does not provide an account of an ethos that is both collective and individual, neglects ethos's tactical dimension and attributes to it a too restricted content for it to be considered a democratic ethos.

The 'Basic Structure' and the 'Sense of Justice'

Rawls originally intends to generalise and carry "to a higher order of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract" as represented by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant.¹⁴ He chooses to move within the tradition of contractarianism, aspiring to offer an alternative to utilitarianism, and he places at the centre of his theory the ideal of justice, conceived as an intuitive

¹³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, expanded edition), xi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

characteristic of free and rational persons. Rawls concentrates on defining a set of principles of social justice that would be accepted by everyone in a democratic society, despite their conflicting interests, in order to choose the social arrangements that would secure the proper distributive shares. The primary subject of these principles is what Rawls calls 'the basic structure of society', or more specifically, "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation".¹⁵ Since this structure is definitive of individuals' life from its beginning, because it introduces unavoidable and deep inequalities, principles of justice are to be chosen in order to address exactly the structure itself. But justice and what is just should not be defined by random factors such as those which the basic structure imposes on people's lives *a priori*; justice constitutes the fundamental charter of a well-ordered human association. In a Kantian way, Rawls hopes to give two principles that are not reduced at the level of the collective or the individual but successfully inform and are informed by both.

Rawls proposes that since rational agents when making decisions are expected to use as their sole criterion their self-interest, when it comes to setting up the procedure under which principles of justice will be chosen they should be stripped of the features of their personality and any particular aims and attachments. This is the point at which classic contract theory proves crucial to Rawls's endeavour, for it offers the idea of original position, that is a purely hypothetical initial status from which fair decisions can be reached, a condition in which parties involved assume their situation behind a 'veil of ignorance'.¹⁶ With the parties having no information on their social position, and thus being ignorant of their conception of the good, Rawls argues, it is possible to secure a fair procedure in deciding and achieving a conception of justice he calls 'justice as fairness'.

It is in this early stage of his theory that Rawls already introduces the idea of an ethos of justice shared by the individual members of the society. The term he uses for this ethos is 'sense of justice' and in order for it to be properly defined it is not adequate to define "a list of the judgments on

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., 102-123.

institutions and actions that we are prepared to render, accompanied with supporting reasons when these are offered”, but rather to define “a formulation of a set of principles which, when conjoined with our beliefs and knowledge of the circumstances, would lead us to make these judgements with their supporting reasons were we to apply these principles conscientiously and intelligently”.¹⁷ In other words, it is assumed that our moral sensibilities are just when they comply with its principles. Again, Rawls hopes that there is an identification of the inner and the outer components of the ethos he finds pertinent to his theory of justice.

Individuals in the original position, then, would agree on a set of principles such that would secure personal and political liberty and would aim to minimise economic inequality. Rawls establishes two such principles: the principle of greatest equal liberty and the principle of fair equality of opportunity, to be completed by the difference principle. It is only after the first principle is satisfied that the second is to be introduced, according to which unavoidable inequalities are to be attached to positions and offices open to all and they are also to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of the society.¹⁸

Rawls recognises that the above mentioned principles are insufficient when it comes to the individual choices and decisions and thus he proposes that there must also be an agreement on the moral rules that govern individuals’ conduct as well as the conduct of states.¹⁹ This agreement on moral rules renders a society ‘well-ordered’, that is one in which not only everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, but also one in which the basic social institutions satisfy and are known to satisfy these principles. A modern democratic society that is well-ordered bears a specific public political culture which is distinct from what Rawls calls the ‘background culture’ of civil society. Whereas the former “comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation [...], as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge”, the latter refers to comprehensive doctrines of

¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸ Ibid., 53-56.

¹⁹ Ibid., 95.

all kinds and thus to the domain of the social, not the political.²⁰ This separation, as will be discussed, is crucial to Rawls's formulation of a political conception of justice.

Such a society can also be described, according to Rawls, as 'a social union of social unions', that is, as a union consisting of various parties that all share the aim of achieving just institutions and in which the relation between human flourishing and justice is two-way: the collective activity of justice is the preeminent form of human flourishing, whereas at the same time "just institutions allow for and encourage the diverse internal life of associations in which individuals realise their more particular aims."²¹ Individuals are bearers of moral virtues, that is excellences, which are displayed in the public life of the society and cause other people's appreciation. Since persons are allowed to express their excellent nature whereas just institutions encourage the realisation of more particular ends in the internal life of associations, the public realisation of justice is a value of community. Social unity is Rawls's conception of political community, where a public conception of justice is the shared moral belief of all members, a trait that secures stability and homogeneity and is feasible and endured through time. It is the motif that, as I have already discussed, Rousseau uses in his envisioning of the ideal republic; Rawls is in fact a Rousseauian.

This idea of stability of the conception of justice as fairness shifts significantly in the various essays Rawls's has published after the *Theory*, to focus more on other issues. He does so in his second major work, *Political Liberalism* (1993), which originally was intended as both a complement and a corrective for the *Theory of Justice*. In his own words, "*Theory and Political Liberalism* try to sketch what the more reasonable conceptions of justice for a democratic regime are and to present a candidate for the most reasonable".²² As in his previous essays, democracy in *Political Liberalism* is already present at the outset in the form of constitutional democracy, being the canvas on which the best account of justice is to be drawn. However, at least

²⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13-14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 463.

²² John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, expanded edition), ix.

two serious shifts that are of our interest here enter Rawls's work since *Theory* and they both have an impact on his account of stability.²³ The first regards the close attention he now pays to "the fact of pluralism", an idea already introduced in 1987 and since then directed to his reworking of the idea of justice.²⁴ The second shift is related to the clarification that Rawls feels obliged to make regarding the political nature of his conception of justice as fairness, amidst criticism that it involves metaphysical accounts of the moral person.²⁵

Introducing Justice-Tackling the Problem of Pluralism

The fact of reasonable pluralism is accepted by Rawls not just as an historical event, but as a permanent feature of democratic public culture and therefore as an event that brings to the fore and challenges the issue of establishing and preserving the unity and stability of society.²⁶ When reflecting on pluralism, Rawls refers to the existence of numerous reasonable but incompatible comprehensive doctrines of philosophical, moral or religious nature that are likely to persist and gain support over time. The reasonable character of the doctrines available in the world poses a problem for democratic society and to sort it out Rawls uses the idea of the overlapping consensus that he had already introduced in the *Theory*, but which now is further elaborated, refined and elevated to the central element in the process of finding a consensus on justice. The idea of such a consensus is based on the postulation that citizens seen as free and equal share a common trait, that of reasonableness, and that they appeal to this trait when they deliberate publicly to decide on issues of justice. Rawls clarifies that such a consensus differs from a *modus vivendi* in that the latter is an agreement between competing parties complying with certain arrangements reached for the sake

²³ For a presentation of more shifts in Rawls' s thought, William A. Galston, "Pluralism and social unity" *Ethics* 99, no. 4 (1989), 711-726; also Rawls, "Justice as fairness: Political not metaphysical", 224, n.2.

²⁴ Rawls, "The idea of an overlapping consensus", 1-25.

²⁵ For example, Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 93-95.

²⁶ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 36.

of self or group interests.²⁷ Moreover, overlapping consensus differs in that its object is a political conception of justice, that is itself a moral conception which includes principles of justice and an account of the political virtues through which those principles are embodied in human character and expressed in public life.²⁸ This agreement on a political conception of justice, thus, “tries to draw solely upon basic intuitive ideas that are embedded in the political institutions of a constitutional democratic regime and the public traditions of their interpretation”.²⁹

Whereas consensus or even convergence of opinions on the concept of justice in the background culture is unattainable, it is possible to achieve a conception of justice in the the public political culture, through a process of deliberation. Despite them both being moral conceptions of justice, a political conception of justice, in contrast to a comprehensive doctrine, (a) is worked out for a specific subject, i.e. the basic structure of a constitutional democracy (b) its acceptance does not presuppose acceptance of a particular comprehensive doctrine and (c) is formulated in terms of intuitive ideas latent in the public political culture.³⁰ The means through which deliberation that establishes the political conception of justice takes place is public reason, which aims to specify “at the deepest level the basic moral and political values that are to determine a constitutional democratic government’s relation to its citizens and their relation to one another”.³¹ But whereas public reason is relevant in what Rawls considers political discussions - a tripartite public political forum involving judges, government officials and candidates for public office - it does not apply to discussions related to the background culture.

Rawls in this way excludes any and every comprehensive doctrine from public dialogue as irrelevant and dangerous, since its presence might jeopardise the impartiality needed when deliberating on issues of justice. His conception of political justice dictates the use of the public political culture of

²⁷ Ibid., 147.

²⁸ Ibid., 147.

²⁹ John Rawls, “Justice as fairness: Political not metaphysical”, 225.

³⁰ Rawls, “The priority of right and ideas of good”, 252.

³¹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 441-2.

a democratic society as the pool from which various implicit fundamental ideas will be drawn in the search of consensus. The formation of a political conception of justice, one upon which an overlapping consensus is reached, is Rawls' way out from the troubles that the fact of pluralism brings in a democratic society, in order to achieve the desired stability of social unity. Most importantly, the political conception of justice is not — at least not necessarily — an original creation, since it is based on already existing ideas and principles, although it can combine them in ways previously unexplored. It is a collection and combination, a reproduction, of the familiar ideas shared by the members of a democratic society on an intuitive basis.

Having discussed the main parameters of Rawls' democratic theory as a theory of the public political culture, we now proceed with discussing how Rawls treats what other political thinkers before him did not, mainly how his liberalism manages to incorporate an idea of the common good, contra to the general liberal reluctance to define it. By doing so, Rawls not only defends liberalism from the charge that there is no common good implicit in it, responding at the same time to the descriptivists' claim of its unattainability; he also relies on a conceptualisation of ethos in order to achieve his definition of that common. Rawls' democratic theory of the public political culture thus offers us a theory of the ethos of liberal constitutional democracy.³²

The Ethos of Justice

The foundation of Rawls' political liberalism is the complex of the familiar ideas implicit in the public political culture of the democratic society, a culture that appears to be the locus from where the fundamental ideas for the expression of a political conception of justice can be drawn. That said, Rawls takes as given the existence of some commonly accepted premises, which result from what he calls a 'tradition of democratic thought' that is implicit in any and every democratic society and that is expected to be intelligible to the

³² For a different approach, see Martin Rhonheimer, "The political ethos of constitutional democracy and the place of natural law in public reason: Rawls' *Political Liberalism* revisited" *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 50 (2005), 1-70.

educated common sense of citizens.³³ Rawls, reworking these fundamental ideas, has formulated a family of terms upon which political liberalism is to be understood: the idea of political justice itself, the conception of society as a fair system of social cooperation over time and two companion ideas, the political conception of the person as free and equal and the conception of a well-ordered society.³⁴ In way of his enquiries towards the elaboration of a political conception of justice, that is a conception of justice suitable to the basic structure of a constitutional democracy, Rawls needs to appeal to a good that is common to the members of the political society.

The idea of a common good shared by the members of a liberal society may appear paradoxical. However, as Rawls's work shows, a common good may well be realised by the citizens of a liberal constitutional democracy, both as individuals and as a corporate body. To be sure, the fact of pluralism excludes a conceptualisation of the political community as a concrete body of pursuers of a common end. Still, according to Rawls, there is room for a common good in a pluralist liberal constitutional democracy, even though "justice as fairness does indeed abandon the ideal of political community if by that ideal is meant a political society united on one (partially or fully) comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine".³⁵ A democratic society as defined by Rawls is not ordered by a comprehensive doctrine but by a political conception of justice. The citizens of a well-ordered society of justice as fairness, then, have a final end in common, one that indeed is political: "namely, the end of supporting just institutions and of giving one another justice accordingly".³⁶ They all work to ensure that every citizen has justice in the distribution of opportunities for each person to pursue their particular good. Crucially, they all endorse an ethos of justice, a sense of justice, that is "an effective desire to comply with the existing rules and to give one another that to which they are entitled",³⁷ an ethos that ensures the

³³ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁵ Rawls, "The priority of right and ideas of good", 269.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

³⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 274-5.

endurance of the democratic society they live in. But such an ethos is anything but democratic.

The Limits of Rawlsian Liberalism

The well-ordered constitutional democracy, or deliberative democracy, that is a democratic regime in which citizens deliberate on what they consider as the most reasonable political conception of justice bearing a distinct and enduring public political culture, forms the basis of Rawls' theory of democracy.³⁸ The principles of justice have a regulatory force and they are given after elaboration of ideas already embedded in the society — while others are excluded or veiled — in order to secure the fair function of the political system. Rawls' democratic theory introduces and supports a “soft” version of democracy, where politics is exhausted in choosing and setting into work the best principles of justice, so that the state machine can work fairly and eternally.

It is this static image of Rawls' democracy that renders his democratic theory vulnerable to Wolin's critical argument of “constructivism”. According to the latter, a mechanism (which allows the selection of principles that regulate the basic structure of society) is assigned precedence over politics. The advantage of constructivism is that it allows us to reach an agreement, even before there is actual consensus.³⁹ In this scheme, justice is an intuitive sense that all human beings carry because it is already embedded in their nature and it is expressed in the ethico-political realm in the conventional form of an overlapping consensus. It is an ideal justice played out in the institutional sphere, “which is meant to provide a critical lever or standard by which to measure the real institutional arrangements of contemporary democratic societies and political cultures”.⁴⁰ Rawls' image of democracy is similar to that of a well-functioning machine.

To these criticisms regarding the quality of democracy in Rawls' democratic theory, this thesis aims to add a criticism regarding the quality of

³⁸ Ibid., 448-450.

³⁹ Wolin, “The liberal/ democratic divide”, 99.

⁴⁰ Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 126.

the ethos he proposes. Not only does Rawls consider democracy a settlement that secures the smooth functioning of the society, restricting it to a procedural or institutional level, and propose the existence of a public political culture that is stable and fixed *a priori* - he also accepts a specific ethos, that of justice, as already embedded in the moral subjects of his democratic theory. This has significant implications for the democratic subjects he admires. For Rawls's democratic subject presupposes that a specified model of rational individual is already accepted as 'normal' and that political behaviour is to be judged according to the criterion set by the acceptance of this model. The ethos of justice that Rawls envisions presupposes a fixed identity and applies to the bearers of this identity.

In the spirit of this ethos, citizens of the Rawlsian constitutional democracy share a common end, that of securing justice for their fellow-citizens and themselves, but this common bond that unites them in a political community, this ethos of justice, is claimed to be a political one in terms of being non-social (religious, philosophical or moral). Rawls, in seeking to build a coherent political conception of justice, immunises the political space against incompatible differences brought in by the fact of pluralism, differences which he ostracises to what he calls 'the social'. His political field is so restricted, that it ends up soulless, synonymous with the juridical and thus inhospitable to any expressive political action. This isolation of the political life from comprehensive doctrines causes Rawls to treat pluralism as a problem for democracy that needs to be solved through denial. When he states that "in a constitutional democracy the public conception of justice should be, so far as possible, independent of controversial philosophical and religious doctrines".⁴¹ Rawls in fact denies recognition of the existence of pluralism in the public life. The vacant place created by the ostracism of pluralism from public life, he seeks to fill with a monism that is manageable and encompassed: a set of rules of justice that imposes a specific order that needs to be followed, not only as far as the field of politics but also the individual is concerned. This individual is not flexible and adaptable, in terms of being attuned to the circumstances that arise, but has a fixed, predictable behaviour according to which she is accepted as citizen. The ethos of justice

⁴¹ Rawls, "Justice as fairness", 1.

is an ethos that appeals to the collective level and as such it is imposed on the citizens of Rawls's liberal constitutional democracy.

Rawls's approach to the political subject, the existence of a political culture and of politics altogether came under strong criticism from the so-called communitarians, who argued for a more substantive role for culture: individuals are already embedded in communities which influence and direct their choices and decisions, so that democratic life cannot be perceived without taking these communities into consideration. The following section discusses how a representative of this strand, Charles Taylor, by way of attempting to amplify this argument, fails to offer an account of a democratic ethos.

II. Charles Taylor: Democracy and the Ethos of Patriotism

John Rawls is not the only one who has tried to articulate a response to the challenge posed by descriptive theorists regarding the attainability of a common good in a democratic political society. But what makes his case peculiar is the fact that his ideal of a moral based consensus generated a whole chain of responses, and not always in line with his own. The most notable critique has come from a number of political theorists who find problematic not just Rawls's effective exclusion from public life of debates over the good but also his very conception of the moral person. These theorists are usually referred to as communitarians, leading to a years-lasting debate between them and advocates of Rawlsian liberalism.⁴²

The focus of the debate can be schematised on a trifold basis: the level of ontology, that is claims about the nature of the subject; the level of methodology, regarding the importance of tradition and social context for political reasoning; the normative level, assessing the possible political

⁴² It is interesting that some of the theorists most commonly identified with communitarianism have explicitly denied this characterization. Michael Sandel, for example, has expressed "some unease with the communitarian label" (in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, ix and 186), since he does not always find himself on that side. Alasdair MacIntyre has denounced the characterisation stating that he is rather pessimistic about the possibility of creation of "worthwhile types of political community" *Letter to The Responsive Community* 1, no. 3 (1991), 91.

implications of communal life.⁴³ The three levels are highly intertwined and discussion of each of them results in engaging the others as well.

Theorists such as Michael Sandel and Benjamin Barber reject the Rawlsian idea of the free moral subject that is independent of its aims and desires, and which is used as the pre-conceptual framework that provides the foundation for the prioritisation of the right over the good. Perhaps the most famous critique at this point is the one that Sandel provides of the 'unencumbered self' of Rawlsian liberalism. Sandel rejects the possibility of separating ourselves from the communities we are members of, since "[t]o imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments such as these is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth".⁴⁴ The importance of community as the source for people's reasoning is vital in the communitarian thesis, since it is acknowledged that it is only in the context of communities that justice and ethical life are meaningful and thus possible.

Even though no single democratic theory can be derived from the work of people that have been characterised as communitarians, due to their many internal differences, there are some points of convergence to be identified among the ideas that these theorists have introduced into the field. An enhanced sense of community, which can even take the form of patriotism and a preference for a kind of "strong democracy", are among these points. The idea of such a democracy is fully developed by Barber in his book of that name, in which the author rejects any idea of political process that does not involve citizens and explains how liberty and equality are not rights to be merely attributed but to be acquired through participation.⁴⁵ Walzer also makes a claim for this type of democracy, setting it as one of the basic requirements of distributive justice and thus of a community life that does not

⁴³ Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13-14.

⁴⁴ Michael Sandel, "The procedural republic and the unencumbered self" *Political Theory* 12, no.1 (1984), 90. Amitai Etzioni presents a moderate approach in his "A moderate communitarian proposal" *Political Theory* 24, no. 2 (1996), 155-171.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

lead to oppression and injuries.⁴⁶ What makes specific the argument for a strong democracy is its prioritisation of a participatory model over a representative one (what can be called “thin democracy”): “The taste for participation is whetted by participation: democracy breeds democracy”.⁴⁷ Both theorists not only are affirmative concerning the question of the attainability of a common good, but they adhere to it as the primary end of political life.

Charles Taylor is one of the theorists usually referred to as a communitarian or a civic republican, since his work on identity/difference, recognition and multicultural politics raises issues in a similar way to theorists bearing the label of communitarian like Walzer and Barber.⁴⁸ Taylor himself claims to be “unhappy” with the use of the term “communitarian”, not least because the exaltation of community over everything sounds to him “as though the critics of this liberalism wanted to substitute some other all-embracing principle”, probably here having in mind nation and nationalism.⁴⁹ Instead, Taylor proposes that in order to avoid confusion one should use the terms “atomists” and “holists”, when issues of ontology are at stake, and “individualists” and “collectivists” for advocacy issues. Despite the fact that these two congeries of issues are distinct, they by no means are independent: for there exist atomist individualists (Nozick is an example here), but holist individualists (Humboldt) and atomist collectivists (B.F. Skinner) as well.⁵⁰

Taylor’s intention here is to bring back to the debate over justice issues of identity and community that the so-called procedural liberal theories that prioritise the right over the good have sought to banish by excluding a

⁴⁶ Michael Walzer, “Justice here and now”, in Michael Walzer and David Miller, *Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory* (Binghamton, NY: Vail Ballou Press, 2007), pp. 68-80.

⁴⁷ Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 265.

⁴⁸ Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1992), Beau Breslin, *The Communitarian Constitution* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), Nicholas A. Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

⁴⁹ James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 250.

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 181-185.

socially endorsed conception of the good, while focusing on the procedures of decision. Restricting the debate *either* to issues of right *or* to issues of the social goods is to be blind to the complexities of the political life. Under these terms, Taylor attacks the much-celebrated neutrality of a Rawlsian-type procedural democracy, for according to his view it fails to promote what he considers to be the necessary element for every modern democratic society. That is, by supporting the idea that society must be neutral on the question of common good, theorists of procedural democracy lose sight of the essential bond that bonds citizens into a shared political sphere.

In this next section, then, Taylor's perception of democracy will be scrutinised. I will argue that his vision of democracy is sustained by a particular ethos; that Taylor's promotion of collectivity over individuality, and his view of the common good as embedded in the social world, dictate a specific democratic vision, one that aspires to treat difference in such a way that it does not hinder public exchange and, in fact, becomes an essential part of it. In order to do so, Taylor needs to appeal to a particular ethos that enables individuals who, despite honouring different values, identify with a community and its ends. In my analysis I suggest that Taylor, despite opting for an ethos to sustain his civic republican vision, fails to honour the inner component of this ethos. I also argue that Taylor, by giving credence to the attainability of an encompassing community, opts for the idea that there exists a pre-political ethos, a pre-understanding among individuals, which can prevent the fragmentation that pluralism necessarily entails. He therefore falls for a moralisation of the political and thus for an image of democracy as the harmonious decision-making process governing the political life of a community that succeeds in assimilating any and every difference.

Taylor's Philosophic Anthropology

In order to appreciate Taylor's political theory and his view of democracy more specifically, one has to take into consideration issues of ontology, epistemology and the conception of the moral subject as these arise in his work. His "philosophic anthropology", by which he means "the study of the

basic categories in which man and his behaviour is to be described and explained”,⁵¹ involves a serious critique of both naturalistic and atomistic accounts of the human nature which interprets individuals as free and self-sufficient agents whose relation to society is exhausted in that it helps them to achieve their particular ends. That said, Taylor challenges the idea that any collectivity is only to be understood as the sum of its individuals and he supports a more intersubjective, holistic and non anthropocentric approach in understanding moral motivation. He attacks atomism and the modern view of what he calls “the disengaged self”, that is the ideal of a self “capable of objectifying not only the surrounding world but also his own emotions and inclinations, fears and compulsions and achieving thereby a kind of distance and self possession which allows him to act ‘rationally’”.⁵² Taylor contrasts this “understanding of the individual as metaphysically independent of society”⁵³ and he seeks to feature the constitutive role of community in the formation of the individual, a view that atomism fails to grasp, along with the very idea that this much-celebrated free individual,

is himself only possible within a certain kind of civilization; that it took a long development of certain institutions and practices, of the rule of law, of rules of equal respect, of habits of common deliberation, of common association, of cultural self-development, and so on, to produce the modern individual; and that without these the very sense of oneself as an individual in the modern meaning of the term would atrophy.⁵⁴

In political theory, Taylor identifies atomism with the contractarian theories of Hobbes and Locke, but also with those of utilitarianism and John Rawls, all in contrast to the civic humanist tradition in which he places himself.

Theorists moving within the boundaries of this latter tradition, like Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Tocqueville, praise the participation of individuals in rule, celebrating it as a good in itself. The fact of

⁵¹ Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behavior* (London: Routledge, 1964), 8.

⁵² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21.

⁵³ Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.

⁵⁴ Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 309.

participation, far from being seen instrumentally, that is as a means for the realisation of other goals, is considered an essential component of human dignity. Moreover, in this tradition the notion of freedom is not the modern negative one; rather, it is used as the antonym for “despotic”, in terms of participation, to highlight the source of legitimacy of state power.⁵⁵ According to the reasoning of this tradition, if compliance with the laws of the political society is not to come from coercion and thus is not a matter of imposition, then what is required in order for this society to stay together is a sense of political identification with the *polis* on behalf of the citizens, a sense of solidarity with their fellow-citizens, a certain type of patriotism. Taylor places himself within this tradition, concluding that republican patriotism is a force which provides explanatory validity to certain responses and reactions that expressions of atomism such as egoism or altruism do not.

Patriotism and Taylor’s Democratic Vision

Patriotism is also at the core of Taylor’s vision of democracy. This is so because in his political thought democracy, seen as a mere set of institutions and procedures that set them into work, is itself a non-sustainable entity and therefore needs to be supplemented and supported by a corresponding civic culture. According to his reasoning, modern democratic states are common enterprises in self-rule and their high demands can be met only by a citizenry that is strongly identified with the state.⁵⁶ He, therefore, moves in the context of republican democratic theory, but he revitalises it and makes his own contribution to it by seeking to provide an alternative model in which the terms of the debate about the accommodation of difference in a constitutional democratic regime are set, without - in contrast to Rawls - aspiring to exclude or disguise it from public debates.

Taylor’s elaboration of democracy begins with the assertion that democracy entails a paradox: on the one hand, it is the rule of the people, by the people, for the people, and as such it involves the greatest number of participants than any other form of political rule; on the other hand, at the

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 187.

⁵⁶ Charles Taylor, “Why democracy needs patriotism” *Boston Review* 19, no. 5 (1994).

same time this very notion of the people produces a dynamic toward exclusion. In order for a democracy to function it needs a tightly formed demos, that is a deliberative unit constituted in such a way “that its members are capable of listening to one another and effectively do so” and that this listening will continue over the future to secure the state’s viability.⁵⁷ According to Taylor, what this form of the demos implies is a certain degree of cohesion, which he translates as “a strong collective identity” or a “mores of commitment”, a sense of reciprocal trust and understanding among the members of the modern democratic society and of each of them to the latter as a totality.⁵⁸ Now, it is exactly this dire need for commonality in a modern democratic society, an essential feature of which is its deep diversity, that urges towards exclusion. In democracy, Taylor assesses, exclusion may target people that enter the state’s political sphere either from abroad or from a condition of previous inactivity. It may also be an inner exclusion, that is one which turns against alternative ways of experiencing modern citizenship, in the context of a regime which presses for a rigid form of political life. In either case, democratic exclusion poses a challenge to democracy itself, one that can be tackled by redefining political life.

Taylor seems to have grasped better than Rawls the fact that modern democracies face a challenge of constant ‘self-reinvention’, that is a process of “redefining their common understandings to include new groups of people, and revising their traditional political culture to accommodate varied identities, both homegrown and newly arrived”.⁵⁹ But he resists the tendency to respond to this challenge with the favouring of the kind of Liberalism that Sandel calls a “procedural republic” and that gives precedence to issues of individual rights and democratic and legal procedures over issues of self-rule. Despite the fact that this approach sounds effective and self-proving given the circumstances of rising fragmentation, it entails the concealment of individual differences in the name of the creation of a common terrain on which public deliberation and decision making can safely be played out. It

⁵⁷ Charles Taylor, “A tension in modern democracy”, in A. Botwinick and W.E. Connolly (eds), *Democracy and Vision*, 80.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

thus gives rise to a model of citizenship in which questions of the good life are kept away from the public sphere, promoting a neutrality that functions to prevent a strong affiliation of citizens with the state. Taylor, whose work echoes Hegel in celebrating human subjectivity but at the same time prioritising community and the standards of legitimacy it provides to individuals, cannot settle with such a neutrality: the modern democratic state bears its own identity. Hegel, who as I have previously discussed honours the ethos in its collective dimension, as the set of common traits shared by the members of a community, is strongly present in Taylor's elaboration. Like Hegel, Taylor also aspires to patriotism as the political disposition that binds individuals to the state. However, Taylor knows that in late modernity differences cannot just be ignored or suppressed.

The approach that Taylor counter-proposes is one that aims to bring issues of individual differences to the fore, one that does not demand from citizens that they abstract from their differences when deliberating on public issues, but instead aspires to their coming to see them as an essential element of their very commonality. According to the line of thought that this model introduces,

people can also bond not in spite of, but because of, difference. They can sense, that is, that the difference enriches each party, that their lives are narrower and less full alone than they are in association with each other. In this sense, the difference defines a complementarity.⁶⁰

In contrast to the procedural republic, Taylor's model of complementarity provides a strong incentive to learn about fellow-citizens' outlooks. In fact, more than other-understanding, it provides a source of self-understanding. In highly complex modern democratic societies recognition, inclusion in participation of all constituent parties of the community are important factors for the function of democracy. In order for these conditions to be satisfied in a society comprised of bearers of different cultures, the claim for equal worth of all these cultures must be recognized. It is here that the concept of "other-understanding", which is inspired by Gadamer's hermeneutics, becomes particularly relevant to Taylor's democratic project.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 89.

The important matter with what Taylor calls a 'comparative model', is that it allows one to enlarge her understanding, not only in terms of recognising and elevating other parties' convictions as equals to hers, but also to gain a critical perspective of herself.⁶¹ More specifically, Taylor favours a response to difference in which understanding of the other is attained "by altering and enlarging [understanding], remaking its forms and limits".⁶² This form of response to difference has a certain impact on one's self-understanding, because it makes one realise that her mode of being is just one possibility among many others. Taylor attributes this to what he perceives as a crucial feature of the human condition and constitutive of the realisation of human identity, that is its fundamentally dialogical character: "We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression."⁶³ Responding to difference by changing our understanding of it entails also shifting the limits of what is intelligible to us, re-articulating these very limits in order to include previously excluded elements: "The sober and rational discourse which tries to understand other cultures has to become aware of itself as one among many possibilities in order properly to understand the others".⁶⁴

Taylor draws on Gadamer, who originally sought to present understanding as the fusion of the horizon of the past and that of the present, explaining that the horizon of the present is always in the process of on-going formation. For Gadamer, the past plays a decisive role in this process.⁶⁵ Taylor presents the process of other-understanding schematically as moving in a broader horizon, "within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to evaluation can be situated as one possibility alongside the

⁶¹ Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 150.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶³ Charles Taylor, "The politics of recognition", in Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 32.

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 149.

⁶⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum Publishing Ltd, 1975 (2004 ed.), 305.

different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture.”⁶⁶ Taylor accepts the charges that the logic of this process will always result in the creation of new limits and will always give rise to new distortions: every new broader horizon will always include one’s own home-understanding. This latter is inescapable, since we will always use our judgements of truth or validity in order to understand the others and to articulate this understanding. But Taylor is explicit: the aim of the process is not to escape horizons, but a fusion of horizons, where attentiveness to include all relevant parts should be shown.

This approach of difference here resembles the discussion of Protagoras in Chapter One. Taylor, by using the metaphor of horizons, seems to be suggesting that differences can be accommodated within culturally specific horizons which then participate into a process of exchange or fusion. Protagoras, we recall, with his man-measure doctrine, suggests that opinions, knowledge and truth are always relevant to the city-context in which they are produced. I have argued that this claim leads Protagoras to affirm the teachability of political knowledge, that is, that people can learn how to respond politically and comport themselves according to the rules of the city. And that it is this affirmation that leads him to transcend the dichotomy between the inner and outer dimension of ethos. Taylor, on the other hand, as I will shortly discuss, fails to do so.

Taylor’s goal here is to overcome ethnocentrism, but still achieve a functioning political society, a community united by a special bond that will be the product of difference. The political community Taylor envisions is an ‘imagined community’ where people accept the law that defines it as the community of those whose freedom it realises and defends. That said, identification of the people with this community stems from the fact that their freedom as human beings is realised within its context, whereas at the same time it provides them with a horizon within which their specific common cultural and national affiliation finds expression.⁶⁷ In fact, the very existence of this political community presupposes the existence of a “deeper patriotic

⁶⁶ Taylor, “The politics of recognition”, 67.

⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, “Democratic exclusion (and its remedies?) The John Ambrose Stack memorial lecture” in Alan C. Cairns, John C. Courtney, Peter MacKinnon, Hans J. Michelmann and David E. Smith (eds.), *Citizenship, Diversity and Pluralism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 268.

identification” among its members, a bond of solidarity “based on a sense of shared fate, where the sharing itself is of value”.⁶⁸ In this sense, civic relationships among the citizenry of a democracy resemble friendship and the commitments taken by friends based on trust⁶⁹ and this trust is extended to processes of collective deliberation and decision-making, hence the importance of listening in Taylor’s account of the demos and the polity’s survival. According to this analysis, decision-making in democracies - a process that Taylor connects also to self-understanding - is subject to three conditions: (a) belonging to a community that shares common purposes and recognition that the other members share them too; (b) giving a genuine hearing to every group during the debate; and (c) safeguarding that decisions express the majority.⁷⁰ But since satisfaction of one of these conditions can fail, fragmentation is always a possible outcome. To fight against this, Taylor turns to the wider social and cultural context.

Taylor’s work is characterised by an ambiguity. For whereas he accepts contingency as a characteristic element in the process of developing self-identity in modernity (since it is dependent on recognition by others),⁷¹ he is also convinced that modern democratic societies need to be bonded more powerfully than chance grouping.⁷² He finds adherence to a common aim inadequate in itself and he therefore proposes that a common identity is at stake, a bond of solidarity in the form of patriotism and more specifically a “deeper patriotic identification”. According to his vision of democracy, the process of democratic decision-making, if reliant only on political institutions, is doomed to failure: it needs to be expanded to a flourishing public sphere, in which cultural, religious and other differences are seriously taken into consideration in the discussion becoming an essential part of it. Under these circumstances, democratic institutions are not sustainable in themselves, but they become so when infused with the sense that their particular cultural and national identities find expression in these institutions. For Taylor, then,

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 192.

⁶⁹ The idea is already familiar since Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII-IX.

⁷⁰ Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 276.

⁷¹ Taylor, “The politics of recognition”, 35.

⁷² Taylor, “Democratic exclusion (and its remedies?)”, 266.

democracy alone cannot generate allegiance: it relies on an extra-political foundation, on an ethos that is pre-democratic and pre-political and which is the result of the process that he describes as other-understanding. This process, taking place under undefined circumstances, is not necessarily political; for as Taylor claims, “meeting foreign cultures” can well be an example of such a process. However, Taylor fails to address the issue of how one can move to a broader horizon and thus attain other-understanding, through an altered self-understanding. In other words, he fails to address to inner component of the ethotic dimension of democracy.

Taylor, in contrast to Rawls, seems to want pluralism as a part of political life. Moreover, he is suspicious of a private definition of the good: the individual good is actually the common good of a community bonded by an ethos of “deeper patriotic identification”. More significantly, he thematises a community of other-understanding as the ultimate ideal, as the community *par excellence* that enables the inclusion of every particular horizon. But such a vision necessarily leads to oppression, since the members of the community, as well as those who wish to become members, are obliged to espouse the common collective morality that Taylor envisions. They are urged by the vision of the perfect community to synchronise themselves, that is their particularities, with the normalising dictates of this community, in order to achieve the level of other and self-understanding that Taylor proposes. The individuals of this community are supposed to be developed according to the latter’s rules and for its sake; they are bound to the “Taylorite model of attunement to a higher purpose in being”.⁷³ However, as I argue in the last chapter of the thesis, democratic individuals need only to be attuned to the circumstances they encounter, not to standard communities and their traits. In contrast to Taylor’s democratic subjects, who are the objects in a process of assimilation, the democratic subjects as envisioned here are continuously redefined through various processes of subjectification. The ethos that motivates and attracts them to this condition of detachment and re-attachment is one that appeals to both the individual and the collective level. The ethos of “deeper patriotic identification” that Taylor appeals to in order to sustain his harmonious democratic community does not bridge the inner with

⁷³ William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2002), 85.

the outer dimensions of democracy, since it cannot project any political outcomes. It is an ethos that is neither as democratic nor as pluralistic he hopes.

III. Iris Marion Young: An Ethos for Communicative Democracy

Attendance to difference as a constitutive element of the public life in democratic societies is an inspiring source for theorists who seek to transcend the neutrality that liberals promote and celebrate, either by supporting a view of democracy as an open discussion where differences are brought in or by rendering diversity the organising theme in their theories. Political theorists choosing the first way thematise democracy as a public debate that aims to maximise the participation of every citizen; the second response to liberal neutrality forms a distinct yet multifarious approach both in political theory and political movements and is known as “identity politics”. Iris Marion Young’s work can be placed in the context of this scheme and can be interpreted as an attempt to bring difference to the fore of political life under certain conditions of communication while criticising essentialism, both in the form of liberalism and that of identity politics.

This section analyses Young’s elaboration of this idea of democracy and in particular considers her attempt to introduce a theory of citizenship that attends to the diversity of group identification that pluralism introduces in a democratic society. But far from attributing to citizenship the status of the only identity suitable to the public sphere, Young adopts what she sees as a radical democratic pluralism that places groups at the centre of political life and the norm of inclusion as the ultimate goal of democracy. She suggests a version of deliberative democracy that she calls communicative democracy envisioning a discursively mediated understanding between bearers of otherness which realises a more inclusive democratic society that produces just solutions for its members. In order to do that Young attends to a distinct ethos, that of differentiated solidarity, which once endorsed by the citizens of the unoppressive city she envisions, will sustain her inclusive democracy. However, the ethos that Young suggests is nothing but a common morality

shared by citizens of the community she envisions; a community neatly ordered and highly inclusive; a community inhabited by rational agents who are willing to hear and understand each other, and therefore a community of normality and harmony. As I argue in the thesis, though, such a vision is insufficient to the internal strife and turbulence characterising a political community, due to the issues of inequality and pluralism inherent in it.

Bricolage: A Method for a Liberatory Politics

Young uses the approach of critical theory and she advances a politics of difference, that is a politics which construes difference not in terms of an obstacle, an unlucky event or an incident that necessarily leads to exclusion, but as an inevitable element of any pluralist democratic society and therefore as a politics that “provides experiential and critical resources for democratic communication that aims to promote justice”.⁷⁴ She draws inspiration from Marcuse’s discussion on the production of universals (Young prefers the term “ideals”) from the experience of reality and she declares herself to be engaged in a “socially and historically situated normative analysis”.⁷⁵ That said, Young draws images from the experience of actually existing democracy which she then elaborates in order to formulate ideals of inclusive democracy. These aim not to function as blueprints or descriptions, but as opportunities to criticise reality and envisage it in a different way. Furthermore, her work on justice poses a well-articulated challenge to the prevailing theory of Rawls, whose work she criticises and seeks to radicalise by interpreting justice in terms of inclusion rather than distribution and individuals as active participants rather than as consumer-oriented individualists. Young’s theory of justice aims to be one of enablement and empowerment.⁷⁶ In general, her theoretical roots are a combination of Liberalism, Republicanism, Feminism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, Psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory and Deconstruction. As she says, in

⁷⁴ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 90-91. See also Iris Marion Young, “Taking the basic structure seriously” *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 1 (2006), 91-97.

defence of this kind of approach that attends to so many theories at the same time, it “aim(s) to expose some of their failings and limitations as tools for illuminating or promoting a liberatory politics. This is the method Claude Levi-Strauss called ‘bricolage’”.⁷⁷

Towards a More Inclusive Democracy

Inclusion is elevated to the central element of Young’s vision of democratic politics and she would thus concur with Taylor on the importance of the participation of every and any citizen in decision-making processes of a democratic polity, and the political impact of social groups both in defining individual identity and in securing a just public policy. Her work introduces the idea of ‘a group-differentiated citizenship’, which challenges both the generalising ideal of universal citizenship that transcends every particularity and the approach of social difference as identity *per se*.⁷⁸ Implicit in this repudiation of the ideal of universal citizenship is Young’s redefinition of the public sphere, away from something strictly civic and towards a more heterogenous public. Accordingly, Young moves from an account that accepts as the only identity valid for the public sphere that of citizen, to one that regards the public as that which acknowledges the irreducibility of difference. It is an Arendtian account where the public is not the comfortable place among those who share a common language, but “a place of appearance where actors stand before others and are subject to mutual scrutiny and judgement from a plurality of perspectives”.⁷⁹ Young’s notion of the social group is inspired by Heidegger’s idea of ‘thrownness’: one finds oneself being thrown into a group, which is already there and will continue to be even after the individual is gone.⁸⁰ That said, groups are prior to individuals and they play a significant role in the formation of the latter’s

⁷⁷ Iris Marion Young, “Reply to Tebble” *Political Theory* 30, no. 2 (2002), 283.

⁷⁸ Iris Marion Young, “Polity and group difference: A critique of the ideal of universal citizenship”, *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989), 250-274.

⁷⁹ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 111.

⁸⁰ Young, “Polity and group difference”, 260. According to Heidegger, “the expression ‘thrownness’ [Geworfenheit] is meant to suggest the *facticity of [Dasein’s] being delivered over*”, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 127.

identities. This makes social groups distinct from both aggregates and associations: the latter are formed on a voluntary basis and the former are so defined by external agents due to a set of attributes shared by their members. Instead, Young argues, members of social groups do not share a common nature; membership must be understood in relational terms:

a social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or ways of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way.⁸¹

Her treatment of groups and difference as focal points for modern pluralist democracies leads Young to endorse a radical democratic pluralism “which acknowledges and affirms the public and political significance of social group differences as a means of ensuring the participation and inclusion of everyone in social and political institutions”.⁸² Thus, the politics advanced by Young appreciates the fluidity of social groups, that is the porous nature of their borders and the internal differentiations within and across them. In contrast to identity politics, the politics that Young advances does not seek to attribute a unified identity to the members of the groups, nor does it consider the latter independent from the individuals constituting them. A pivotal role in this thematisation of identity and politics is attributed to recognition, the subject of which is the social group that struggles against the structural inequalities prevailing in modern democratic societies. Young’s democratic theory, then, is a theory of justice which seeks to accommodate the concerns of social justice movements, where justice is not conceived in terms of distributing benefits and duties, but as the elimination of oppression and domination, the two conditions of injustice which obscure self-development and self-determination.⁸³ Young detects a double circularity implicit in the relation between democracy and justice: first, if democracy is to promote

⁸¹ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43.

⁸² Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 168.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 33-38.

justice, it must already be just; second, since modern democracies are torn by structural inequalities, any effort to promote justice will produce more injustice. To break this double circularity, Young suggests that we need to deepen democracy, to make it more inclusive. For this reason she aspires to the norms provided by deliberative democracy, in the context of which she places her work.

Young uses the norm of inclusion as the primary condition of democracy, an inclusion played out on the register of decision-making processes and she thus wishes to attribute to it an explicitly political meaning.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that she considers the model of deliberative democracy as offering the most prominent account for an inclusive democracy, she does not endorse it without criticism. Rather, she introduces a broader and more inclusive model of communicative democracy in which “differences of social position and identity perspective function as a resource for public reason rather than as divisions that public reason transcends”.⁸⁵ It is a model that seeks to overcome what she finds problematic in deliberative democratic theory, like the suggested idea that the latter is culturally neutral and universal. This presumption, she suggests, flows from privileging argument as the primary form of political communication. Young is concerned with the possible exclusion of the needs of groups that either do not fit in the shared understanding as expressed in public arguments or are not communicated due to limitations imposed to these groups by their lack of what she calls the norm ‘articulateness’.⁸⁶ Furthermore, she assesses argument as being a dispassionate and disembodied form of communication that tends to presuppose an opposition between reason and emotion and that is too narrow and exclusive to exhaust the function of communication. Instead, she suggests that if communication is to be democratic and inclusive it must be responsive to an expanded conception of political communication. She therefore proposes three modes that enrich communication: greeting, or

⁸⁴ Ibid., 13. She also acknowledges the importance of other secondary norms, such as political equality, reasonableness, and publicity, Ibid., 23-25.

⁸⁵ Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the other: Beyond deliberative democracy”, in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 127.

⁸⁶ Young, *Democracy and Inclusion*, 38.

public acknowledgement, rhetoric, and narrative or situated knowledge.⁸⁷ The aim of adopting such an expanded perception of political communication is to achieve communication across wide differences of cultures and social position.

Another way that Young distances herself from theorists of deliberative democracy is by criticising their view of it as aiming to construct or discover a unity, meaning that they consider commonness as a condition of deliberation or as its goal. In the first case, shared understanding among the members of the polity is presumed to exist, an assumption that Young problematises given the circumstances in modern pluralist societies. Not least, this presumption obviates the need for transformations from self-regarding to enlarged thought, a highly-valued aspect of a discussion-based model of democracy:

If discussion succeeds primarily when it appeals to what the discussants all share, then none need revise their opinions or viewpoints in order to take account of perspectives and experiences beyond them. Even if they need the others to see what they all share, each finds in the other only a mirror for him or herself.⁸⁸

On the other hand, those who theorise political discussion as aiming at commonness that transcends any difference tend to exaggerate consensus at the expense of disadvantaged groups and to the benefit of the privileged. At this point Young's thought draws on the ideas of those endorsing an "agonistic" model of democratic process, where democratic debate is less a polite, orderly, dispassionate argument and more a "struggle". Aspiring to bring passions, experiences and mainly difference to the fore of political discussion, Young gives precedence to "a process of communicative *engagement* of citizens with one another".⁸⁹

In her account of democratic politics as "a deliberation in a heterogenous public which affirms group differences and gives specific representation to

⁸⁷ Ibid., 57-77.

⁸⁸ Young, "Communication and the Other", 125.

⁸⁹ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 50.

oppressed groups”,⁹⁰ Young does not endorse the ideal of community as Taylor and the communitarians do. Rather, she proposes a different account of unity, a “minimal” one, where unity is translated to proximity. The rationale behind this argument is that it is proximity that produces politics: “A polity consists of people who live together, who are stuck with one another”.⁹¹ If a polity is to be a communicative democracy, something more is needed: an agreement on the rules of deliberation and decision-making as well as equal respect for each other. This much weaker unity in comparison to the one endorsed both by deliberative democrats and communitarians is exemplified in Young’s alternative to the latter’s ideal of community. Bringing together Derrida and his view that the ideal of community participates in the metaphysics of presence with Adorno who finds in the logic of community the logic of identity, and thus a metaphysics that denies difference,⁹² she counter-proposes the ideal of city life as most pertinent to the realities of modern pluralistic societies. This ideal of the unoppressive city, that “is not planned and coherent, which embodies difference and the being-together with strangers”,⁹³ is Young’s vehicle towards a politics of difference. It is a political entity of strangers living close to each other and which is defined by its openness to unassimilated otherness.

These elaborations bring Young to a radical version of the deliberative model, one in which there is no common good neither as a starting point nor as the ultimate target of political communication. In its place there are the different stories and experiences that participants bring with them when they enter democratic decision-making processes, the different points from which they argue when articulating their needs and demands. But there is also a shared world in which they all dwell and when they communicate their different perspectives of that world to each other, “they collectively constitute an enlarged understanding of that world”.⁹⁴ Democracy, as theorised by

⁹⁰ Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 260.

⁹¹ Young, “Communication and the Other”, 126.

⁹² Iris Marion Young, “The ideal of community and the politics of difference”, in Colin Farrelly (ed.), *Contemporary Political Theory: A Reader* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 195.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹⁴ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 112.

Young, can only function effectively - i.e. produce just solutions - when different situated participants realise and respect their condition as such and internalise a mediated understanding by listening across their differences.

Problematizing the Ethos of Differentiated Solidarity

Young believes that a political entity functioning under these terms needs a certain disposition, a certain ethos that brings different situated participants together; she suggests that this is an ethos of *differentiated solidarity*. This exceeds processes such as assimilation in that it “allows for a certain degree of separation among people who seek each other out because of social or cultural affinities they have with one another that they do not share with others”.⁹⁵ Thus it allows space for particularist self-affirmation and for the development of interest in solving common problems through deliberation, while maintaining differentiated positions.

Young’s theory of a more inclusive communicative democracy that is able to produce just results is sustained and indeed reinforced by the ethos of differentiated solidarity she proposes. By choosing the word “solidarity”, Young wishes to put emphasis on “a concept of mutual respect and caring that presumes distance”,⁹⁶ being thus completely compatible with the conditions of living in modern societies where people are strangers and remain strangers to each other despite the moments of common experience they share. The basis of this ethos is neither the too weak conception of toleration nor the too strong feeling of communal identification. Rather, she argues, it is the very fact that people live together, their proximity that imposes similar circumstances, needs and problems on them and this obliges them to act collectively to promote justice for everyone. Implicit in this ethos is the idea of openness to unassimilated otherness, which goes hand in hand with a respectful distance:

To be open to unassimilated otherness means not only acknowledging clear differences, but also affirming that persons have multiple

⁹⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 222.

memberships, and that some persons, either by choice or by accident, do not fit any characterisation.⁹⁷

Such an ethos, suited as it is to the circumstances of city life, corresponds to the ideal of differentiated citizenship that Young finds most appropriate for her variation of deliberative democracy.

There is, however, a series of shortcomings with this ethos. I find that Young not only fails to address how her imagined solidarity among distanced but caring, as she says, individuals is cultivated if it is to be conducted through the processes of deliberation she theorises. I also find that her concept of proximity is all-too-encompassing, for it presupposes a commonality (of problems, needs and circumstances) that is too fixed. Despite recognising the fact of multiple memberships, Young fails to appreciate and include in her analysis their temporal and therefore fugitive character. This is why her democratic vision is based on a strong conception of polity, despite her intentions to the opposite. This polity is one that is kept vivid and productive — in terms of justice — only as long as it is regulated by the rules of deliberation and decision-making: city life has its own rules. It is a localised and protected polity, while its members are expected to be the bearers of a specific ethos if this universe is to function. This neatly ordered city life that Young thematises reminds us Walt Whitman's poetry and his idea of social solidarity among strangers. Her city is a well-ordered society, where each differentiated group has its place and justice along with equality prevail, whereas oppression and suffering have vanished, thanks to the prevailing of the ethos of differentiated solidarity. Her polity is not that unoppressive as she wishes it to be.

To summarise, Young is committed to an inclusive model of communicative democracy in which differences are expected to function as a resource for public reason. Despite her intentions to abstain from a strong definition of the polity that would seek to enforce homogeneity and would thus lead to exclusion, Young at the end falls for a vision of a community that is too fixed and instructive. This is dictated by her vision of differentiated solidarity which

⁹⁷ Ibid., 225.

realises inclusion and the participation of everyone so as to ensure the just character of the city life. Young hopes that this solidarity gives rise to acceptance of otherness and therefore also to understanding among individuals who remain strangers to each other. But she does not explain how this solidarity is to thrive and that it is based on the assumption of a commonality of concerns, to which differentiated individuals correspond with respect and care to each other. That is, Young remains inattentive to the tactical dimension of democracy, failing to grasp the need for work on the self that her solidarity would demand. By completely overlooking the private component of ethos, Young seems to understand solidarity as a collective morality that *ought to be shared* by the citizens of the unoppressive city, so that this ideal is to be fulfilled.

Moreover, there is an ambiguity within Young's democratic theory and it is connected to her strong and explicit rejection of the claim that there can and should be an attainable common good among the citizens of a democratic polity: "The ideal of a common good, a general will a shared public life leads to pressures for a homogeneous citizenry".⁹⁸ But what else is the disposition that she thematises as the ethos of differentiated solidarity and which is to sustain her vision of inclusive democracy, if not a conception of a common good shared by each and every member of her unoppressive city? Even though it is not a substantive one, the common ethos that Young aspires to is an integral part of her theorisation of the community: were it not for this vision of a common good her ideal of an inclusive polity would remain unfulfilled. Perhaps Young is more Hegelian than she wishes, in that she sees the community - the unoppressive city - as embodying its own *Sittlichkeit*, its own distinct way of life. Despite her intentions, Young cannot in fact avoid the presence of a common good in her democratic theory and she ends up with a moralised conception of a democratic ethos.

⁹⁸ Young, "Polity and group difference", 253.

IV. Conclusion

The chapter has suggested that despite significant differences in their starting points, methodologies and modes of argumentation the three thinkers scrutinised here, Rawls, Taylor and Young, all appeal to ethos when developing their ideas on democracy. They do not do so explicitly. Each of them poses the issue in a different way, using his/her own distinct vocabulary to articulate it. But each eventually needs to appeal to an ethos to sustain the democratic vision which they propose, suggesting that the members of a democratic community need to share certain moral commitments, if this polity is to achieve its goal of justice, harmony or differentiated citizenship. They all, thus, end up with a moralised view of democracy and of politics in general, as well as with a sketch of an ideal polity that can be imagined to be concise, coherent and free from paradoxes. Furthermore, they all encounter pluralism as an issue that needs to be treated and, even more significantly, all of them respond to the challenge posed by descriptivist theorists of democracy who reject the attainability of a common good in a democratic polity. In fact, as the analysis has shown, a concept of a common good is unavoidable for theorists who engage with democracy and who appeal to an ethos to maintain their democratic vision. But it is, I believe, a common good too bold, fixed and stable to be one that corresponds to the differentiated allegations of individuals in late modern democracy. Rather, as I argue in the following chapters, the common good must be affirmed as fugitive and momentary.

Even a committed liberal like Rawls explicitly declares that the common good has a place in liberal theory and he thematises it when developing his theory of justice. The latter needs a concise and perpetuated public political culture recognised as already embedded in the moral subjects of the public sphere, in order to support the constitutional democracy that is the canvas of Rawls's democratic theory. In his reading, the political culture of a democratic society is characterised by the diversity of the reasonable doctrines found in it, and it is exactly their trait of reasonableness that poses the problem with regard to pluralism, since it is due to this trait that these doctrines are incompatible. Rawls solution to the problem is the introduction of a comprehensive moral system which he hopes contains diversity and provides

the neutrality that he believes that the field of politics needs. The system of justice he introduces is nothing else than a moral comprehensive doctrine, that seals off the public sphere, creating and maintaining the stability and orderliness that Rawlsian democracy needs to function. This doctrine is sustained by an ethos of justice that the Rawlsian individuals are expected to carry within themselves, an ethos that allows and enables decision-making under circumstances of neutrality. It is a bureaucratic but by no means democratic ethos.

The work of the two other theorists scrutinised in this chapter is a response to Rawls's perception of democracy and pluralism by way of taking on the issue of difference. In the case of Charles Taylor ethos is again present, although in a very different form, since what is at issue in his theory has nothing to do with the search for a political conception of justice. Rather, Taylor is mainly concerned with finding the golden mean that will allow individuals who are bearers of different ideas to live in a harmonious community where they can better pursue the ultimate goal of their self-realisation. For this harmonious community to be achieved foreign cultures should become more accessible to us, a mission that, according to Taylor, can be accomplished through understanding others. Taylor claims that he does not wish to introduce a model that rejects difference and strives for uniformity in the name of any commonality. Rather, his anxiety is "how people can bond together in difference without abstracting from their differences",⁹⁹ introducing for this reason the idea of complementarity of difference, that is the idea that differences add to the fullness of humanity through exchange and communion between them.¹⁰⁰ His model of civic republicanism is based on this idea of understanding difference, in contrast to the procedural Rawlsian model which urges us to ignore it. But the ideal political community of inclusion of every horizon that Taylor envisions can be realised only through the identification of its diverse members with it. It is here that Taylor needs a deep patriotic ethos to infuse his democratic vision. This ethos is a common collective morality shared by the different constituencies of his community, if the latter is to satisfy its principle of harmony. Taylor's

⁹⁹ Taylor, "The dynamics of democratic exclusion", 153.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

democratic individuals are programmed to stay tuned with the common good of the harmonious community, enchained by an ethos that is neither democratic nor pluralistic.

Young offers an alternative both to the Rawlsian model of distributive justice and to the Taylorite ideal of the harmonious community. Unlike Rawls's, her justice is achieved through political empowerment rather than redistribution or recognition, whereas her public realm, unlike Taylor's, is not characterised by unity but by proximity and it therefore functions not despite but because of its heterogeneity. Young rejects critics who blame the politics of difference for endangering democracy by weakening public commitment to a common good. She rejects as misleading the identification of the politics of difference with identity politics, at the same time downplaying the role of 'common good' when conflicts emanating from the existence of social group differences emerge. Rather, she suggests that it is more important to take account of the specificities of differentiated relations.¹⁰¹ This is so because difference perceived as a potential resource for democratic communication enables the preservation of the plurality of the diverse perspectives available in the democratic society.

Young advances a model of communicative democracy, where openness and willingness to listen to others' mode of expression, is the only way for pursuing it: "[i]n democratic struggle citizens engage with others in the attempt to win their hearts and minds, that is, their assent. To do so they should be open and reasonable, and be prepared to challenge others through criticism and not merely the assertion of opposition".¹⁰² The importance of ethos in Young's theorisation of democracy is underlined by the fact that she envisions a citizenry of individuals who understand and join each other in making just decisions to solve real life problems while remaining divided by their differences. Young needs a disposition that brings this heterogenous bunch of individuals close (the proximity she refers to) at least as far as the recognition of the commonality of the problem is concerned. For if a differentiated polity is not motivated to begin with recognising a problem as common, then by no means can it ever get into a

¹⁰¹ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 81-87

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 51

process of deliberation to solve it: Young seems unable to escape the paradox of founding inherent in every contract theory. Citizens in Young's formulation of democracy are bound despite their difference, or better because of their differentiated citizenship, by an ethos of differentiated solidarity. Because of that, they are expected to carry specific traits, that is, to be reasonable and infused with an ethos of solidarity. Even though she claims to resist the idea of aspiring to a common good, Young in fact has to appeal to a unity in order to sustain her democratic vision. She wants to keep distance from both Rawls and Taylor and she claims to celebrate pluralism. In fact, she only gives nuances to their perception of pluralism, one that resembles the image of a mosaic, within which each difference has its place, as long as it keeps itself within that place, within the rules of the political game.

The revival of the idea of common good by normative theorists goes hand in hand with the effort to address the issue of pluralism, as well as with the articulation of a conception of ethos as the necessary element that unites or at least brings individuals closer in a modern democratic pluralist society. In their effort to do so, the democratic theorists discussed in this chapter end up with a moralised view of democracy, by aspiring to a view of the democratic polity as the harmonious immunised community which engages in a moral deliberation aided by a common morality and a common good, despite some intentions to avoid the latter.

This target — of avoiding the coil around a common good strictly defined and determined — is shared by theorists who are said to pursue an agonistic democratic vision. Iris Marion Young, despite claiming to be willing to follow this path, at the end fails to do so by substituting for political struggle entailed in an agonistic view of democracy with a moral truth. The next chapter discusses how theorists of agonism tackle the issue of pluralism by accepting the division in the common good or by suggesting a very thin version of it and looks at how their democratic theory is characterised not by the fact of a common ontology or epistemology shared by them, but by the introduction of ethos as the essence of democracy. At the same time, I will suggest that Connolly and Mouffe are more successful in appealing to an ethos to sustain

their democratic visions, for they affirm democracy as an *agon* and they therefore honour the complexity and multidimensionality of democracy.

Chapter 4

Democracy as Ethos: The Agonistic Pluralism of Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly

During the 1990s, and partly as a result of criticism of the democratic theories of writers such as Taylor and Young, an alternative approach to theorising democracy emerged. This approach challenged both descriptive (or aggregative) and deliberative democratic theories, seeking to respond to their shortcomings through critical reflection while refusing to reduce democracy to either a method or a straightforwardly rational moral consensus. Thinkers who are engaged in the articulation of this alternative perspective worry that advocates of deliberation and description, by focusing on the need for consensus, propose in advance an account of democracy that is narrowly juridical, administrative and thus managerial or else overloaded with concealed, 'pre-political' moral images of thought. Consequently, they argue, mainstream theories of democracy confine politics to the task of stabilising moral and political subjects.¹ As such the theory of democracy comes to rely on a kind of anti-political perspective which threatens the very existence of democracy. Such a sterilised view is incapable of mobilising citizens: instead, it renders them passive bearers of rights and simple spectators of decisions made by experts. As a result, populists or *demagogues* of every kind find the political terrain ever more fruitful as they seek the support of those citizens who see themselves excluded from the political life.

Out of such criticism a distinct account of democracy has emerged. It seeks to correct the procedural liberalism espoused by Rawls, Taylor and Young challenging not only the idea that consensus in politics can be reached through rational deliberation and the bracketing of diverse doctrines, views and beliefs but also the very centrality afforded to 'agreement' in political life. Instead it calls for much greater attention to be paid to the role of conflict and *agon* in democratic politics.

¹ Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 2.

The purpose of this chapter is to scrutinise the work of two of the most influential thinkers of this agonistic perspective and in particular to make clear the role they attribute to ethos in democracy. The chapter argues that in enquiring into the essence of democracy in late modern societies, theorists of agonistic democracy come to develop a concept of an ethos which infuses their visions of democracy. That ethos incorporates elements which agonists see as inextricable and characteristic of political life as such: pluralism, difference and struggle but also experimentation and performativity.

Section I of this chapter is a kind of “ground-clearing” exercise, presenting an overview of the specificities of the agonistic perspective on democratic theory and putting into context the work of two key thinkers: Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly. It starts by giving a general account of the agonistic approach to politics and it then turns to the antecedents of agonism, Nietzsche and Arendt. It then sees how the work of these two thinkers has influenced the work of some contemporary thinkers. Sections II and III provide a parallel reading of the work of Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly, discussing how each theorist directly and indirectly articulates a concept of ethos specific to democratic thought. In so doing, both sections adopt the contexts, terminologies and definitions characteristic of the distinct style of each theorist, working within their framework, as a way of utilising their own suggestions on undecidability, contestability and politicisation. The overall aim of this reading is to show that both thinkers are on the same plane with regard to their view of democracy, placing contest at the center of their vision. Their important differences notwithstanding, both thinkers attend to pluralism not simply to tackle it as a problem but in order to utilise it in favour of democracy. That is, they do not only embrace pluralism for its own sake, nor do they stop at celebrating the contribution of contestation to democratic life. Rather, their critical endeavours are part of an active promotion of the democratic ‘way of life’ and as part of this they seek to formulate and promote a conception of ethos in its political dimension that is appropriate for the conditions of pluralism in late modern democracies.

The complementary reading attempted here leads me to the conclusion that it is because of their inclination to articulate *democratic identifications as an ethos* that both Mouffe and Connolly succeed in being more consistent

and justified in their conception of ethos than those thinkers we examined in Chapter Three. However, as the discussion shows, they fail to attend to the interplay between the inner and outer dimension of a democratic ethos and this failure sets limitations on their democratic visions. Inevitably, they end up suggesting an ideal in the place of the one they seek to challenge, that is an ethical category that is too stable: their aspirations notwithstanding, neither of them manages to escape or resist the tendency to be instructive. I find that this proves crucial for their intention to explicate an agonistic form of democracy since, as I argue in the thesis, if we are to infuse such a democratic vision with an ethic and the shifting challenges of the democratic *agon*, we need to conceptualise an ethic that is more open to these challenges.

Section IV provides a summary of the parallel reading of Connolly and Mouffe and bridges the argument against their case with the next chapter. At the very end, these two thinkers fail to grasp the importance of a democratic ethos that is attuned to the peculiarities of the political moment. To be sure, a central claim of the chapter is that only by reading their work together and in a complementary fashion can we appreciate the virtues and shortcomings of their approach to ethos and so come up with a more productive conclusion that is pertinent to the circumstances in late modernity. This methodology of complementary reading I will follow also in Chapter Five, since I find that such a reading allows me to engage in the work of the theorists under scrutiny in a more creative way; it enables me to incorporate in the discussion my own views and thus come up with a distinct approach of their work. This is in line with what I have previously referred to as a “theory of creativity and imagination”, one that I find more pertinent to democracy, especially as envisaged in the thesis as multifaceted and kaleidoscopic. This approach is, again, inspired by Nietzsche’s evaluation of theory and practice as inseparable: here, I do not intend to stand above my object of enquiry, but to participate in it and blend my personal views with what Connolly and Mouffe (and later Wolin and Rancière) say.

I. Theorising Democracy as *Agon*

The term “agonistic democracy” has been coined to describe the model of reflecting on and practicing democracy which maintains that politics is all about conflict, competition over power and resistance, and for which disagreement is endemic to democracy itself and an indispensable part of political life. The specificity of this approach, then, lies in the fact that, as Bonnie Honig puts it, “agonistic conflict is celebrated and the identification or conflation of politics with administration is charged with closing down the *agon* or with duplicitously participating in its contests while pretending to rise above them”.² According to this line of thinking, differences in doctrines, beliefs and preferences cannot but be brought to the fore and disagreement plays the role of catalyst in the cultivation of agonistic relations among political agents. Pluralism, then, emerges as a central issue for theorists who seek to respond to the descriptive accounts of democracy without falling back on the security of a moral consensus. These theorists worry that the treatment that such accounts reserve for pluralism, that is as an unavoidable problem of late-modern societies that needs to be resolved, results in injuries and exclusions. They propose instead that pluralism is constitutive of late-modern democracy; that indeed it is the very essence of democracy and therefore needs not merely to be preserved, but further enriched and enhanced.

Attentiveness to elements of diversification rather than homogenisation is a crucial element in the democratic thought of agonistic theorists. They consider identities as not existing in isolation, but rather as being constructed relationally within a highly diverse social space. As already mentioned in Chapter One, Foucault sees the regimes of power and knowledge as participating in the construction of the modern subject; it is not only other subjects that participate in the shaping of one’s identity, but the heterogenous public space, as well. The plurality of ideas and beliefs that prevails in this space is further fostered within an agonistic process of political practice, because this latter allows the enhancement of diversity and communication among contrasting parties. Thus, contrary to proceduralists, these theorists

² Ibid., 2.

emphasise the need to contest ethical and cultural questions, instead of ostracising them from democratic discourse.³ Moreover, they do not completely renounce the possibility of consensus, but instead clarify that once achieved it will always be exclusionary and the result of coercion. For that reason they seek to disturb the naturalisation and fixation of norms and categories, and instead understand them as contingencies while seeking to problematise the exclusions caused by such classifications.

As a result, two different ontologies emerge in democratic theory, one of concord and one of discordance.⁴ Whereas for the former harmony is the ultimate goal of individual and collective subjects and is achievable through the suppression of otherness, for the latter attentiveness to the contingency of identity, and thus to the discordance that is already or will be lodged within any order, is crucial for democratic thinking and acting. Theorists working on this second plane are wary of the normalising effects brought into the political life by the over-appreciation of concordance and the idealisation of democracy as a condition of balance and harmony. Instead they seek to bring democracy's ambiguity to the fore while appreciating the dynamics that contest brings in the political field. Among the most distinguished thinkers who endorse such an agonistic model of democracy are Romand Coles, William E. Connolly, Bonnie Honig, Chantal Mouffe, Aletta Norval, James Tully and others.⁵

As William Connolly suggests, the specificity of this mode of approaching democracy rests on the fact that, contrary to liberal "neutralist" models which seek to leave outside the public realm disagreements concerning the good, while giving primacy over the right, the agonistic mode tends to bring these

³ Aletta J. Norval, *Aversive Democracy: Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39.

⁴ William E. Connolly, *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 9-12.

⁵ Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2002 exp.edition); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); Aletta J. Norval, *Aversive Democracy: Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Young explicitly joins this group (2000, 49-51) and her contribution and its shortcomings are discussed in the previous chapter.

very disagreements to the fore and make suggestions for tackling them. It also breaks with the democratic idealism of communitarianism through its refusal to equate concern for human dignity with a quest for rational consensus. Furthermore, it breaks with the political minimalism of democratic individualism that in the name of the protection of the individual confines politics to its “bare essentials”. Agonistic democracy, in contrast, appreciates the role of differences in the creation of political spaces in which these differences can flourish whilst in contestation with others. Finally, it aims at providing a democratic vision that transcends the boundaries of the territorial state, an account that can function not against but in complementarity with the institutional politics of territorial democracy.⁶

Agonistic democrats are inspired by a variety of different sources and earlier thinkers from Friedrich Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt to Carl Schmitt and Ludwig Wittgenstein. But they share in a celebration of the idea of the *agon* and in particular the Nietzschean interpretation of this ancient Greek practice which informs some of the most insightful agonistic accounts of democracy. Nietzsche’s admiration for the *agon* stems not merely from the fact that he considers it to embody a legitimate expression of power; it is also related to his perception of the *agon* as forming meaningful relations among people and thus as enabling the recognition of human possibilities. The *agon* helps people to affirm the possibilities of human beings and even when they do not participate in the *agon* themselves, it enables them to pursue those possibilities as their own.⁷ Nietzsche celebrates the *agon* for its contribution to the quest of self-development.

Nietzsche discusses the *agon* in an early work, “Homer’s Contest”, in which he praises the character of the ancient Greeks. He celebrates their embrace of their “natural” qualities along with their human characteristics, that is “a trait of cruelty, a tigerish lust to annihilate”.⁸ They embody, he declares, an “uncanny dual character”, since their practices are guided by the

⁶ Connolly, *Identity/ Difference*, x-xi.

⁷ Christa Davis Acampora, “Contesting Nietzsche” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 24 (2002), 2.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Homer’s contest”, in Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 32.

double-faced goddess Eris: the evil Eris, that leads men into hostile fights of annihilation against one another, and the good Eris who spurs men to the activity of fights which are contests.⁹ It is this latter kind of activity that he finds pertinent to the world of artists, but also to the world of political life. For Nietzsche every talent must unfold itself in fighting; artists, that is people with creative talent, engage in contests with each other and they do so by attending to their opponent's strong points. He therefore reclaims the relationship of contest with art: a cacophony as it may sound to moderns, to ancients the artist is only defined as someone who is engaged in a personal fight. This idea is summarised in Plato's aphorism "Only the contest made me a poet, a sophist, an orator".¹⁰ It is an idea that Nietzsche sees as condemned by the moderns, for whom nothing is to be more fearful in an artist than the emotion of any personal fight. To moderns, Nietzsche assumes, a work of art is valued and appreciated for its weakness.

The art of politics does not remain intact from this distortion, since moderns would refuse to see the positive face of Eris; to them, contest threatens the social cohesion and stability and it is thus a potentially dangerous factor that needs to be annihilated from the field of social life and politics. It is an important point that in Nietzsche the idea of *agon* is distinct from the lust to annihilate. His purpose is to enable the openness of the contest against closure. The *agon* is a place or moment in which the facts of difference and plurality are exposed and experienced, where the *pathos of distance* that allows both the persistence of difference and self-overcoming, is reproduced.¹¹ Contest unfolds itself in political life in the practice of ostracism, an the institution introduced exactly to preserve the struggle and therefore the health of the state. For Nietzsche, exclusion of the best citizens safeguards the perpetuity of the contest, functioning less as a safety valve and more as a means of stimulation:

the individual who towers above the rest is eliminated so that the contest of forces may reawaken [...] That is the core of the Hellenic

⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰ Ibid., 38.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151 (section 257).

notion of the contest: it abominates the rule of one and fears its dangers; it desires, as a *protection* against the genius, another genius.¹²

This institution is a mode of safeguarding in the political field what Nietzsche calls “an order of rank” and which he believes necessarily exists between people because of their difference. *Agon* in Nietzsche is an outcome of the inevitable difference, of the need to be different, to constantly demand “new expansions of distance” and to struggle for its preservation.

The interplay between agonism and difference appears in the work of another thinker who inspires proponents of an agonistic model of democracy. Although she departs from Nietzsche in several aspects, Hannah Arendt embraces his tendency to interpret action in terms of performance.¹³ It is this approach to political action as a performative form of politics, and the ideas of activism and resistibility that it echoes, which render Arendt’s work stimulating for agonistic democrats. For Arendt, political activity is action par excellence (and action is thus one of the most central of political concepts). She turns to ancient Greece to reclaim the idea of action not as a means towards an ultimate end, but as self-contained, that is, as an activity that possesses and makes apparent a specific greatness of its own: action is beginning.¹⁴ This equation is the actualisation of the human condition of ‘natality’, of the fact that every new life that comes to the world adds something new, distinct and unique to it. At the same time, action is always bound to speech, not only because one always attributes meaning to one’s deeds through words, but also because one discloses one’s unique identity through speech. Like Nietzsche, Arendt finds that human plurality is inherent in the public realm.¹⁵

It is the combination of action and speech that conditions human plurality: “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that

¹² Nietzsche, “Homer’s contest”, 36-37.

¹³ For Arendt’s Nietzscheanism, as well as its limits, see Dana R. Villa, “Beyond good and evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the aestheticisation of political action” *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (1992), 274-308.

¹⁴ Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 45-46.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 175.

is, human in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live".¹⁶ There is something uniquely distinct in human beings, we learn from Arendt: their paradoxical plurality, which is revealed through speech and action. I have already discussed how Young also attends to speech and plurality and places it at the center of her work. However, Young, with her overemphasis on the role of inclusion and therefore of the communicative framework within which politics takes place, simply cannot grasp the essence of natality to which political action is bound. Arendt's political action is all about being able to disrupt a given order and begin something new; it is in this sense that it is inherently agonistic.

This reinvention of the *agon* as a source of self-development and as the striving to prevent stagnation has proved inspiring for thinkers who are uncomfortable with liberalism's fixation on harmonious arrangements, and who seek a radical approach to political procedures, citizenship and democracy itself. For example, William Connolly embraces the Nietzschean idea of contestation as flowing from the fact of pluralism and he aspires to an agonistic respect among combatants in order to preserve it. For Bonnie Honig, the agonistic and performative impulse of Arendt's politics and a radical reading of the latter in terms of resisting the dichotomy of public/private that Arendt introduces, provides inspiration for "a feminist politics that seeks to contest (performatively and agonistically) the prevailing construction of sex and gender into binary and binding categories of identity...".¹⁷ Despite their differences, both thinkers seek to challenge the limits of the political field and to expand them, calling for an unceasing struggle against stability and harmonious consensus. In the final chapter of the thesis, I give my personal account of *agonistic* democracy, a democracy thus defined for its constant call for awareness of the circumstances and the possibilities for action they provide.

It is this insistence on the role of disagreement and contestation on behalf of agonists that introduces a fundamental difference between agonistic theorists and those aspiring to reason and consensus as the definitive traits

¹⁶ Ibid, 8.

¹⁷ Bonnie Honig, "Toward an agonistic feminism: Hannah Arendt and the politics of identity", in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 216.

of late modern political life. Agonists call us to attend to the ambiguity which is inherent in democracy and which is created due to its simultaneous drive to appreciate individuality while at the same time urging enhancement of commonalities among subjects. This ambiguity is actually suppressed by those who seek to resolve it, be they individualists or communitarians. In contrast, theorists of agonism attend to this ambiguity, which they indeed consider inherent to democracy, not by urging a strong idea of the common good or by refuting its possibility altogether. Instead they accept the division within the common good (as William Connolly does) or propose a thin version of it (as is the case for Chantal Mouffe). It is this way of 'being-together' against descriptivists and proceduralists while at the same time disagreeing with each other that renders theorists of agonistic democracy so attentive to the challenge of pluralism and to the problem of how diverse subjects can still be the bearers of moments of political commonality.

Agonists are drawn to the struggle against those who want to confine democracy to regulations, administration and measurable opinions; but as the discussion in the following section suggests, they do not form a unified and concrete body of defenders of democracy. Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly take different positions within this battlefield. Still, it is the complementarity of their projects that renders them a challenging voice to the exigencies of the late modern condition.

II. Mouffe's Agonistic Pluralism: Democratic Citizenship as an Ethos

Arguing that a shift in focus from consensus towards democracy's adversarial dimension can contribute to the radicalisation and revitalisation of modern democracy by revealing and tackling the paradoxes inherent to it, Chantal Mouffe has emerged as a key figure among theorists of an agonistic account of democracy.

This section will discuss how Mouffe generates a democratic vision which she describes as "agonistic pluralism" and which she integrates into the

wider theoretical context of radical democracy.¹⁸ This vision seeks to “re-establish the lost connection between politics and ethics” by employing an immanent critique of the modern democratic tradition in its aggregative and deliberative articulations, in order to elaborate a more promising form of democratic citizenship suited to the conditions of late-modern pluralism which Mouffe sees as constitutive of democratic societies. It is a vision that aims to attribute a new role to the Left, as the force that will empower the “polyphony of voices, each of which constitutes its own irreducible discursive identity”.¹⁹ The section argues that, by way of elaborating her vision, Mouffe attends to democratic citizenship as an ethos and more specifically as constitutive of the sense of belonging to or identifying with a specific political community, a *societas*, that is kept together by an ethico-political bond articulated in terms of a common code of conduct. The latter, Mouffe argues, allows those who participate in the community, the adversaries, to gather in a common symbolic space which they wish to organise in different ways and deliberate over without suppressing their passions in order not to persuade but to *convert* their adversary.²⁰

For Mouffe, it is only by envisaging citizenship as an ethos, as a specific mode of ethico-political identification that modern liberal democracy can be articulated in political terms and democratic confrontation escape the limit of mere competition between irreconcilable moral views. However, as I argue, her civic republicanism poses serious limitations to her vision for a pluralistic democracy, not least because she fails to keep an open mind with regard to the limits of the pluralism she seeks to safeguard; because she delimits the capacity of democracy only to those who embrace liberalism; and because she fails to attend to the transformative moves which need to take place on the ethical register during the *agon* and were her democratic ethos to thrive. At the end Mouffe, does not differ from the liberal theorists discussed in the previous chapter in that she also attends to ethos as a frame of action, failing to pay attention to the action itself and to the moment of its occurrence.

¹⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 101.

¹⁹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 191.

²⁰ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 102.

Mouffe's work on democracy is deployed in the framework of the post-Marxist theory she developed with Ernesto Laclau in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. In this work the two theorists develop a post-Marxist and more specifically Gramscian conception of hegemony, affirmed as a specific form of political relation. They advance a critique of the idealised view of human sociability and emphasise instead the role of power in the formation of social objectivity, seeking to locate the Left in a project that aspires to the refashioning of democracy in a radical and plural direction. Mouffe's democratic vision is a post-Marxist one, for it entails that the theorist now understands Marxism as being inadequate to provide the tools and the conceptions of subjectivity suited to the social and economic developments of late modern democracies. However, it should not be translated as anti-Marxism, as its rejection, but as "the other which Marxism must become (thereby ceasing to be itself) in order to remain true to itself".²¹ Thus conceived, Mouffe's work is placed within the post-Marxist tradition for she aspires to discursive formations which have been elaborated within Marxism, such as the Gramscian conception of hegemony and the emphasis on the element of antagonism. She attributes to both a constitutive role in any political order recognising them as ineradicable features of any society. But at the same time, hers is a *post-Marxism* in that she understands liberal democracy as "a political form of society that is defined exclusively at the level of the political, leaving aside its possible articulation with an economic system".²² It is by placing her work in a post-Marxist tradition, that is by recognising Marxism's limitations and historicity, that Mouffe aspires to "give to Marxism its theoretical dignity",²³ while also enriching it with elements and methods drawn from diverse sources.

²¹ Warren Montag, "Politics: Transcendent or immanent? A response to Miguel Vatter's 'Machiavelli after Marx'" *Theory and Event* 7, no.4 (2004), §3.

²² Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy, power, and the 'political'", in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 245.

²³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism without apologies" *New Left Review* 166, (1987), 105.

To begin with, the repertoire of her theoretical tools is an amalgam of schemes and insights such as the Wittgensteinian critique of the rationalist subject, Schmitt's analysis of the tension between democracy and liberalism, Oakeshott's reflections on civil association, but also Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis. What makes her work distinct is that Mouffe succeeds in developing a dialogue with conservative thinkers, such as Schmitt and Oakeshott, while still elaborating a democratic vision that is radical and provocative. These theorists, as she puts it, "can better shake our dogmatic assumptions than liberal apologists".²⁴

Mouffe follows a Wittgensteinian perspective that is strongly critical of the rationalist traditions of political theory, putting forward an anti-essentialist critique of the necessity for foundations on which political identities and movements are built. She contends that such an attitude is necessary if a theorist is to propose a radical approach to democracy and tackle the issue of pluralism satisfactorily, for

it is only in the context of a political theory that takes account of the critique of essentialism [...] that it is possible to formulate the aims of a radical democratic politics in a way that makes room for the contemporary proliferation of political spaces and the multiplicity of democratic demands.²⁵

In particular she directs her anti-essentialism at the assumption associated with liberal thinkers such as Rawls that the specific epistemological project of the Enlightenment is the precondition for the political project of modern democracy, and thus that the critique of the former actually jeopardises its own fundamentals and consequently modern democracy itself. According to Mouffe, overestimation of the rationalist aspect of human nature results in denial of the negativity inherent in sociability rendering "democratic theory unable to grasp the nature of the 'political' in its dimension of hostility and antagonism".²⁶ I consider this evaluation of antagonism-as-negativity as a point of major departure from Nietzsche, who celebrates the contest, but also

²⁴ Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 4.

²⁵ Mouffe, "Democracy, power, and the 'political'", 245.

²⁶ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 132.

from Connolly, a departure that blinds Mouffe with reference to the inner aspect of ethos, since she does not honour the impact that the engagement in the *agon* has on the individual's self-development.

Mouffe's work is also rooted in Derridean deconstruction and in particular the concept of "undecidability". According to Mouffe, deconstruction not only "reveals the impossibility of establishing a consensus without exclusion", it also "forces us to keep the democratic contestation alive", since it "warns us against the illusion that Justice could ever be instantiated in the institutions of any society."²⁷ Deconstruction reveals the structural undecidability that conditions any decision and responsibility of an ethical or political nature.²⁸ Ernesto Laclau has further elaborated the concept of undecidability. As he puts it,

the hiding of the "ultimate" undecidability of any decision will never be complete and social coherence will only be achieved at the cost of repressing something that negates it. It is in this sense that any consensus, that any objective and differential system of rules implies, as its most essential possibility, a dimension of coercion.²⁹

It is the presence of coercion which flows from attempts to suppress the destabilising effects that undecidability entails, along with the fact that it is unavoidable that informs Mouffe's vision of an agonistic democracy.

Another idea that Mouffe draws from Derrida is that of the "constitutive outside" —a term originally coined by Henry Staten.³⁰ This concept plays a crucial role in her argument with regard to identity, with the "outside" being incommensurable with but at the same time the condition for the emergence of the "inside". This entails that the relation between the two is not one of "dialectical negation"; which means that Mouffe - unlike Taylor and Young who see identities as relational constructed and as based on practices of

²⁷ Chantal Mouffe, "Deconstruction, pragmatism and the politics of democracy", in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism: Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau & Richard Rorty* (London: Routledge, 1996), 9.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Remarks on deconstruction and pragmatism", in Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, 87.

²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 172.

³⁰ Henry State, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), 16-17.

recognition and negation - does not settle with the assumption that there is no “us” without “them”. Rather, she follows the deconstructive logic which holds that everything is constructed as *difference*, the latter construed as the very condition of possibility of being: something’s being is not a mere “presence” or “objectivity”, it is constructed as difference, so the “constitutive outside” is in fact always present within the inside. Thus “the ‘outside’ is not simply the outside of a concrete content, but something that puts into question ‘concreteness’ as such: the ‘them’ is not the constitutive opposite of a concrete ‘us’, but the symbol of what makes *any* ‘us’ impossible”.³¹ According to this logic, the “them” represents the condition of possibility of the “us”. The “constitutive outside” is paradoxical: it operates as a defining principle for every social formation, while at the same time threatening it.

Another thinker that Mouffe draws on is Carl Schmitt. Mouffe uses his reflections on the notion of “the political” as something that can only be understood in the context of “friend/enemy” groupings: “the political” is always concerned with collective forms of identification; it has to do with conflict and antagonism, which she finds inherent within different types of social relations and which can take many forms.³² “The political” refers to the realm of decision, not free discussion and is an immanent and determinant ontological dimension of human societies.³³

It is the identification of “the political” with antagonism that differentiates Mouffe from the theorists discussed in Chapter Three. All of them presuppose the existence of a kind of consensus (articulated in moral terms) among the members of their polities, aspiring to communities of justice and harmony. They see exclusion as a challenge inherent in democracy, but one that democracy needs to tackle. By contrast, Mouffe affirms exclusion as a prerequisite of democracy by its own constitution, a presumption that she again owes to Schmitt. From this line of thought stems Mouffe’s conception of the democratic society, not as a place of perfect harmonised social relations but as a field where each social actor deploys her power recognising that she will never achieve total conquest. The democratic

³¹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 12-13.

³² *Ibid.*, 101.

³³ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 11.

character of a society lies in the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself the representation of the totality: any social objectivity is political and thus is constituted through exclusion.³⁴

According to Schmitt, the very logic of democracy implies a necessary moment of closure, a distinction between “us/them”, in order to define who belongs to the *demos*, which is democracy’s central concept, and consequently to allow the exercise of democratic rights. But liberalism’s universalistic rhetoric, which places “humanity” at the core of its imaginary, presupposes an equality of all individuals that belong to this totality, an equality which is non-political “because it lacks the correlate of a possible inequality from which every equality receives its specific meaning”.³⁵ This liberal ideal of equality cannot form the basis for democracy, because it is unable to conceptualise the necessary frontier between “us”/“them”. Liberal democracy entails a paradox and theories of democracy that try to bury it miss the specificity of “the political”, which lies exactly in its dimension of antagonism. “The political” is liberal democracy’s blind spot.³⁶

Despite placing her work in the context of post-structuralism, Mouffe draws a line of separation between her work and that strand of postmodern political thinkers who envisage democratic politics as an “endless conversation” with the Other.³⁷ By adopting the language of ethics, she contends, these postmodern thinkers substantially eliminate the dimension of “the political”, which Mouffe considers so important for a democratic politics of agonism:

While the deliberative democrats, with their emphasis on impartiality and rational consensus, tend to formulate the ends of democratic politics in the vocabulary of Kantian moral reasoning, the second view [of these postmodern thinkers] eschews the language of universal morality and envisages democracy not as deontological but as an “ethical” enterprise, as the unending pursuit of the recognition of the Other.³⁸

³⁴ Mouffe, “Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism?”, 752.

³⁵ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 39.

³⁶ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 12.

³⁷ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 129. As Mouffe notes, she is referring to those who are inspired by Levinas, Arendt, Heidegger and Nietzsche.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 129.

According to Mouffe, these postmodern approaches are problematic because they miss the moment of decision which characterises the field of politics. By assuming that it is possible to engage with other's differences with the aim of reaching an understanding, these theorists celebrate a kind of pluralism that "implies the possibility of a plurality without antagonism, of a friend without an enemy, an agonism without antagonism".³⁹ Although she does not intend to disassociate ethics from politics, Mouffe does not share these theorists' optimism that the ethical and the political can ever coincide.

I believe that this assumption also differentiates Mouffe from Taylor and Young who, as I have already discussed in Chapter Three, base their visions of democracy on, respectively, the assumption of other-understanding through a fusion of particular horizons and a discursively mediated understanding. I argued that their approaches lead to the moralisation of political issues, since they presume that the members of a polity ought to share certain moral commitments. For Mouffe, the language of ethics or morality not only is inadequate in order for the antagonistic dimension of human relations to be articulated; it is dangerous as well. When "the political" is placed on the moral register, the "us"/"them" relation that characterises it takes the form of "good"/"evil" and opponents are then presented as an enemy to be annihilated. To revitalise liberal democracy the "us"/"them" relation needs to be articulated in the language of "the political": this is central to Mouffe's democratic vision. However, I believe that despite her intentions Mouffe fails to attribute this political trait to relations of antagonism because she aspires to an ethos as a grammar of conduct and therefore as a code that aims to regulate these relations.

The Nature of Mouffe's Agonistic Democracy

Mouffe's democratic vision is structured around the embrace of an agonistic pluralism that is based on the reconstruction of the "we"/"they" discrimination in a way that is compatible with such a pluralism. Before analysing the specificity of her vision, it is useful to see how Mouffe elaborates a

³⁹ Ibid., 134.

radicalised form of liberal democracy, one in which passions are not excluded but indeed are welcome.

To begin with, Mouffe suggests that democracy ought to be understood as a political form of society, as a regime, in order for the dimension of “the political” to be grasped. As she puts it:

Conceptualising it as a regime, democracy concerns the symbolic ordering of social relations and is much more than a mere ‘form of government’. It is a specific form of organising human coexistence politically that results from the articulation between two different traditions: on the one side, political liberalism (rule of law, separation of powers and individual rights) and, on the other side, the democratic tradition of popular sovereignty.⁴⁰

That said, Mouffe does not envisage a revolution that will subvert liberal democracy, for she does not reject the ideals of freedom and equality embodied in it. Neither is she interested in radicalising these ideals, for she affirms that “it is not possible to find more radical principles for organising society”.⁴¹ Instead, she seeks to forge a different path for their implementation, postulating the development of new vocabularies that will enable the emergence of new understandings of both freedom and equality, two principles that within the liberal democratic tradition are incompatible:

We are facing a big deficit of these kinds of new vocabularies and we are at a moment in which the hegemony of neoliberal discourse is so strong that it seems as if there is no alternative [...] When I say ‘vocabularies’, of course, I am not speaking only in terms of linguistics; it also means thinking about what kind of institutions, what kind of practices could be the ones in which new forms of citizenship exist and what form of grassroots democracy could be conducive to the establishment of this kind of radical democratic hegemony.⁴²

Mouffe’s democratic vision, then, is not a substitute for liberal democracy *per se*, but rather the actual implementation of its already radical constitutive

⁴⁰Mouffe, “Democracy, power, and the ‘political’”, 245-6.

⁴¹ Chantal Mouffe, “Democratic politics today”, in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (London: Verso, 1992), 1.

⁴² Lynn Worsham and Garry Olson, “Rethinking political community: Chantal Mouffe’s liberal socialism”, in Garry Olson and Lynn Worsham (eds), *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 180-1.

elements - liberty and equality. This requires a political terrain in which there is space for agonism and recognition of the pluralistic nature of contemporary democracies.

Another element of Mouffe's adversarial model of democracy is that it aspires to galvanise people and their identities in ways that cause their metamorphosis: "To accept the view of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity. It is more a sort of conversion than a process of rational persuasion".⁴³ The radical democratic vision that Mouffe advocates is one that aspires to attribute a political nature to the exchange between citizens with conflictual allegiances and identifications, with all the turbulence that this approach entails. She also wishes to attribute a political nature to the self-development of citizens, since it is affirmed as being the result of an adversarial exchange. However, as I demonstrate, Mouffe's specific aspiration to ethos cancels her efforts and brings her closer to the theorists discussed in Chapter Three.

We can now see how Mouffe's reformulation of liberal democracy is based on reading it as pluralist democracy, namely as a regime where the recognition of the centrality of pluralism is a core element. She reminds us that the difference between ancient and modern democracy is not the size but the nature of the regime: modern democracy's specificity lies in that it acknowledges the pluralism of values, what Max Weber recognised as the "disenchantment of the world" and therefore allows room for conflict as unavoidable in it.⁴⁴ Pluralism is constitutive of modern liberal democracy, it is its very heart and this should not be accepted just as "the fact of pluralism", as Rawls claims. Mouffe bases the importance of pluralism not at the empirical level, that is to say on the fact that there is a diversity of the conceptions of the good in a liberal society, but at the symbolic level such that it becomes what she calls the axiological principle of pluralism: the recognition of pluralism implies a profound transformation in the symbolic ordering of social relations.⁴⁵

⁴³ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 103.

⁴⁵ Mouffe, "Democracy, power, and the 'political'", 246.

The distinctiveness of Mouffe's formulation of pluralism lies in the importance she places on power and antagonism. Against liberal pluralism, that seeks to minimise the importance of differences and isolate them in the sphere of citizens' private lives, Mouffe makes pluralism an axiological principle, constitutive of modern democracy, its *sine qua non*. Seen in this way, pluralism is something that should be celebrated and enhanced, not suppressed and refused. It is for this reason that one of her basic concerns is not how to overcome, or moralise, the "us"/"them" discrimination, which is an always present constituent of human societies, but how to establish it in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy.⁴⁶

For Mouffe, as for Schmitt, the distinction between "us" and "them" is a constitutive element of a democratic regime. However, where Schmitt sees an unbridgeable gap between liberalism and democracy, one that renders liberal democracy a hybrid system doomed to failure,⁴⁷ Mouffe detects a chance to remedy the liberal democratic formulation. The aim of democratic politics is not to overcome the "we"/"they" discrimination that informs all collective identities but to construct it in a way that energises the democratic confrontation.

In order to satisfy this concern, Mouffe advocates a Wittgensteinian theorisation of an agonistic pluralism, in which conflicts are unavoidable and take place between adversaries, not enemies, who all recognise the positions of the others as legitimate ones. An adversary is a "legitimate enemy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy".⁴⁸ There is, then, a specific quality, disposition or ethos that characterises and informs the relation between adversaries, for they acknowledge the legitimacy of their opponent. The principle of legitimacy is related to the fact that the conflict between adversaries does not destroy the political association, but takes place in the context of democratic procedures which they accept, and is regulated by the values of liberty and equality. This is why Mouffe embraces a non extreme

⁴⁶ Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism?" *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (1999), 755.

⁴⁷ The thesis was formulated in Schmitt's *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1926) and is analysed in Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 105-115.

⁴⁸ Mouffe, "Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism?", 755.

pluralism, that is a pluralism with limits: it is imperative that democratic politics always sets limits to pluralism by denying recognition as legitimate adversaries to those who put into question its basic institutions.⁴⁹ Although a total pluralism, that is a totally inclusive pluralism, may seem attractive and impressively close to “authentic” or “absolute” democracy, it loses sight of the dimension of the political, erasing relations of power and antagonism. It does so by valorising all difference and by overlooking the necessity of the construction of collective identities which can express a diverse sum of demands.⁵⁰ Mouffe focuses on the importance of the political nature of these limits, instead of presenting them as requirements of morality or rationality. As she puts it, “[t]he agonistic approach does not pretend to encompass all differences and to overcome all forms of exclusion. But exclusions are envisaged in political and not in moral terms”.⁵¹ Limits thus articulated protect democracy by preventing the we/they relation from being articulated in moral terms and thus taking the antagonistic form of friend/enemy.

It is exactly because the drawing of limits between legitimate and illegitimate demands is based on political grounds that these limits are always open to contestation. In Mouffe’s model of a pluralist democratic society, “the normative dimension inscribed in political institutions [is] of an ‘ethico-political’ nature, [since] it always refers to specific practices, depending on particular contexts and [...] it is not the expression of a universal morality”.⁵² Contrary to what rationalist advocates of democracy conclude, antagonisms do not disappear when they are minimised through the pursuit of consensus and their exclusion from the public sphere; they transform themselves into religious, ethnic or social fundamentalisms. This is the reason that Mouffe thinks we ought ‘to give them a political outlet within an “agonistic” pluralistic democratic system’.⁵³ This system is not a sealed and protected area of political conduct; rather, it is one that allows the

⁴⁹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 120.

⁵⁰ Mouffe, “Democracy, power, and the ‘political’”, 247.

⁵¹ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 120.

⁵² *Ibid*, 121.

⁵³ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 114.

multiplication of “the institutions, the forms of life that foster identification with democratic values”.⁵⁴ Hence its pluralistic and democratic character.

The crucial detail about this context, though, is that it is not perceived as immutable, but as susceptible to redefinition through hegemonic struggle.⁵⁵ The elaboration of the idea of the adversary becomes, therefore, Mouffe’s way into the schematisation of what she holds to be the aim of democratic politics, that is to transform the antagonism into agonism. Although they both are forms of antagonism, their *differentia* is that the first one takes place between enemies who aim at the other’s annihilation, while the second one takes place between adversaries, where the latter are “friendly enemies”: friendly in the sense that they share a common space; enemies in the sense that they want to organise this space differently.⁵⁶ Mouffe’s model of agonistic pluralism aspires to be one that leaves space for the emergence of conflict and division as a legitimate part of political life, in which agonism is a “tamed” form of antagonistic relation.

What is important for the thesis though is the disposition underlying Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism; one that informs the relations between the adversaries that participate in this democratic shared space of conflict. I will now discuss this ethos, its constitution, its strong points, as well as its shortcomings.

The Ethos of Radical Democratic Citizenship

Mouffe’s radical democratic vision is based on the assumption that modern democracy faces the challenge of how diverse cultural, religious or linguistic identifications can be compatible with political identification, that is with identification with a political community. She affirms that since class identification can no longer support the aims of the Left, the latter needs to turn to citizenship as a common point of political identification.⁵⁷ The project,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁵ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 33.

⁵⁶ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13.

⁵⁷ Mouffe, “Democratic politics today”, 3.

then, of a radical plural democracy necessarily entails the “rediscovery of citizenship”, that is envisaging “a form of commonality that respects diversity and makes room for different forms of individuality”.⁵⁸ In her reconceptualisation of citizenship, Mouffe relies on a certain ethos that democratic subjects share, one that is based on their acknowledging as legitimate adversaries those who adhere to the principles of liberty and equality.

By way of reworking citizenship, Mouffe combines the liberal tradition, that embrace the assertion that all individuals are free and equal, with the civic republican tradition which focuses on the idea of citizens’ participation in political processes. Such a combined approach to citizenship prevents its relegation to a merely legal status and seeks to value citizenship as a form of identification and thus to restore the link between social and political citizenship. Thus conceived, radical democratic citizenship makes room for dissensus over the common good by way of replacing the passive bearer of individual rights with a socially located self that is subject to continuous re-identifications through different articulations.⁵⁹ Such a radical approach to citizenship can only be conceived as meaningful and productive in the context of a political community that despite not being bounded by a strictly defined common good, still provides the necessary linkage among its participants, functioning both as a “social imaginary” and as a “grammar of conduct”. In other words, it needs an ethos. Since her democratic vision affirms confrontation as being ceaseless and as taking place among legitimate adversaries, Mouffe needs a common ground on which this continuous battle can be held. To define this common ground she relies on Oakeshott’s reflections on civil association and finds pertinent his usage of the term *societas*. According to Oakeshott, those who participate in an association of this type do not do so in order to pursue a common purpose or interest, for this is the case with a different association, a *universitas*; rather, they recognise themselves as members of the *societas*, that is as *socius*, because they feel that there is a bond that binds them with the association.

⁵⁸ Chantal Mouffe, “Liberal socialism and pluralism: Which citizenship?”, in Judith Squires (ed.), *Principled Positions* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1993), 81.

⁵⁹ Worsham and Olson, “Rethinking political community: Chantal Mouffe’s liberal socialism”, 178.

There is a certain type of loyalty they feel towards the other members of the association.⁶⁰ As Mouffe observes, *societas* “is not a mode of relation, therefore, in terms of common action but a relation in which participants are related to one another in the acknowledgment of the authority of certain conditions in acting”.⁶¹ This is the type of association that Mouffe finds pertinent to conditions of radical democratic citizenship: an association characterised by a specific quality of the relation between its participants.

The adherence of the participants of *societas* is not the product of persuasion or rational argumentation, but a result of their *sittlich* relation to it. As she puts it:

The real issue is not to find arguments to justify the rationality or universality of liberal democracy that would be acceptable by every rational or reasonable person. [...] To secure allegiance and adhesion to those principles what is needed is the creation of a democratic ethos.⁶²

Thus understood, citizenship is not merely a legal status: it is a form of identification with the principles of liberty and equality. The latter are not mere rights, but are ethical values that inspire the citizens. Hence the ethico-political quality of these principles. As a result, citizens have the sense of belonging to a political community, “a mode of political association which, although it does not postulate the existence of a substantive common good, nevertheless implies the idea of commonality [...], of a political community even if it is not in the strong sense”.⁶³ Democratic citizenship is a sense of belonging to such a community and the identification with the rules of civil intercourse that characterise it; it is an ethos.

Mouffe needs to reformulate Oakeshott’s *societas* if it is to be compatible with her radical vision of democracy, since she conceives it as referring only to the “we” side neglecting the “they” side that a political relation always includes. *Societas* already provides the idea of an association that is created

⁶⁰ Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 201

⁶¹ Chantal Mouffe, “Democratic citizenship and the political community”, in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (London: Verso, 1992), 232.

⁶² Mouffe, “Deconstruction, pragmatism and the politics of democracy”, 5-6.

⁶³ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 66.

not around the idea of a common good, but of an ethico-political bond. In Wittgensteinian terms, the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy constitute a “grammar” of political conduct.⁶⁴ But whereas it inspires citizens qua adversaries to identify with them, at the same time this leaves room for dissensus. For while they all accept a set of institutions and practices as the necessary framework for the function of the regime, the citizens disagree on the articulation and interpretation of the democratic logic of equality and the liberal logic of liberty. Such a democratic political community must be understood as a “chain of equivalence” and therefore as “a community without a definite shape or a definite identity and in continuous re-enactment”.⁶⁵ Although there is a certain unity, this community will never be fully inclusive or unified, because it will always demand the presence of a “them”, of a constitutive outside, to secure its political character. According to Mouffe, though, this is a tension that cannot, and indeed shall not, be reconciled, for this irresolvable tension is the very condition for the preservation of the indeterminacy and undecidability which are constitutive of modern democracy, preventing a final closure and the negation of democracy.⁶⁶ In Mouffe’s radical democratic project, ethos secures not only the maintenance of a vibrant and active participatory citizenship, but the ‘ventilation’, as Connolly might put it⁶⁷ and survival of liberal democracy itself.

Criticism and Limitations

Challenging and inspiring as it may be, Mouffe’s theorisation of agonistic democracy and the democratic ethos corresponding to it do not go without criticism.⁶⁸ To begin with, I find Mouffe’s failure to address the inner

⁶⁴ Mouffe, “Democratic citizenship and the political community”, 231.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 233.

⁶⁶ Mouffe, “Democratic politics today”, 13.

⁶⁷ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 218.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Andrew Knops, “Debate: Agonism as deliberation - On Mouffe’s theory of democracy” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2007), 115-126; Andrew Robinson, “Accepting contingency or imposing authority? A reply to Thomassen” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6, no. 4 (2004), 562-564; Stefan Rummens, “Democracy as a non-hegemonic struggle? Disambiguating Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic model of politics” *Constellations* 16, no. 3 (2009), 377-391.

component of ethos highly problematic. Although she explicitly affirms the need for a quality that characterises the relations between adversaries, Mouffe fails to discuss the nature of such an ethic per se. At the same time, she also fails to address the transformative moves which need to take place on the ethical register if a radical pluralist democracy is to thrive. For if the importance of the *agon* as Nietzsche poses it is self-development, Mouffe does not provide any clues with regard to what is the impact on citizens' identities of their engagement in democratic struggles, not only upon their entering them but after leaving the field of contest. Her civic republicanism draws her attention on the aspect of the collective: Mouffe focuses on *societas* and citizenship as collective identification and completely neglects the dimension of the individual (on which, as we shall see, Connolly concentrates).

Moreover, I find that her envisioning of ethos as a "grammar of political conduct" is too narrow and stingy to inspire the relations between conflicting identities, between adversaries and hence between "others". Mouffe believes that a democratic ethos is a mode of identification with the principles of liberty and equality. Indeed, she thinks that these can be regulatory principles for the democratic community. There are, I think, three problems with this assumption. The first is that it is not obvious how an adherence to these two principles alone can itself inform conduct between competing constituencies in a way that secures a pluralistic democracy. I find that there are dispositions which Connolly (but also other thinkers, such as Honig or Coles) contribute to the discussion which are more pertinent to the exigencies brought to the field of the *agon* by the participants. This field, as I argue in Chapter Six, is too unpredictable and multidimensional to be regulated by two principles; a more open and affirmative attitude is needed, if pluralism and the continuation of the strife are to be safeguard. The *metical* ethos I argue for is open to the challenges that the moment of the democratic *agon* bears.

The second problem relates to the requirement of radical democrats to embrace liberalism. Mouffe's embrace of liberal democracy prevents her from affirming the possibilities for democratic identification available to constituencies that do not espouse liberalism. Not only does Mouffe predetermine the reign of liberalism and the impossibility of challenging it; she

also does not allow in her adversarial democracy space for those who would be willing to participate in the agonistic exchange while at the same time combating liberalism. Equality and liberty are not two principles that liberalism has coined; other resonances also embrace them but seek to discredit liberalism.⁶⁹

The third problem regards the too suggestive nature of Mouffe's "grammar of political conduct". We have seen how she tries to articulate adversarial relations in political terms and she also attends to the impact that agonistic exchange has on individuals' identities. However, she wishes this exchange to take place under specific rules - to be guided by an ethos understood as code. This also entails that she ends up offering her support to an idea of the democratic community which is too restrictive, given the fact that it is one that is imbued by specific rules of conduct. At the end, Mouffe is not very different from Taylor and Young (and Hegel) in supposing that the political community, her *societas*, has its own ethos. Individuals ought to stay attuned to it, if pluralistic democracy is to thrive.

Overall, I see Mouffe's efforts to present the agonistic relations which she finds so essential to democracy as giving us important clues with regard to the form of democratic *agon*. At the same time, though, I am afraid that Mouffe pays too much attention to the frame that would justify the political character of the agonistic exchange, while neglecting the democratic action itself. However, as I argue in the thesis, we need to be more alert to the challenges and peculiarities that the *moment* bears, so that we can be responsive to them by undertaking *kairotic* action, that is by developing tactics that are always pertinent. Ethos has a tactical dimension and Mouffe seems unable to grasp it.

At the end, I find that Mouffe exchanges radicalism for a too strong commitment to liberalism. It is her affirmation of liberalism as the condition for pluralism that leads her to privilege a particular ethico-political form, a task that drains her project of an otherwise more generous approach to plurality. At the same time, her insistence on attributing the trait of the democrat only to liberals entails her failure to keep an open mind with regards to the limits

⁶⁹ Anarchism would be an example here. See the work of Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

of the pluralism she seeks to safeguard. Not least, Mouffe fails to appreciate the complexity of the contemporary condition and incorporate relevant issues in her discussion of democracy. That is, she is not attentive to issues related on the pressures that capitalism, mass movements of populations or environmental changes pose on late modern democracy. I believe that William Connolly concurs with Mouffe at many points, while addressing others that she does not. Most significantly, he addresses these issues from a completely different ontological angle. I find his work more pertinent to the contemporary condition and to the type of democracy and ethos defended in this thesis. However there are, still significant aspects of his democratic vision that are justly subject to criticism. This is why I suggest that the works of the two thinkers can be read complementarily in a way that enables us to perceive their limits but also to move beyond them.

III. Connolly's Liberal Agonism: The Ethos of Pluralisation

William Connolly has made an important and innovative contribution to the refashioning of the terms through which are articulated the theories of democracy, pluralism and political theory more generally.⁷⁰ In seeking to rework the democratic imagination, he has introduced a whole new assemblage of concepts and has brought to fore themes developed by thinkers from fields as diverse as neuroscience, chemistry and complexity theory. Like Mouffe, he also embraces a liberal approach to politics detecting, however, a need for a new militant liberalism that “challenges forces that press for uniformity, pre-emptive wars, surveillance and inequality”. At the same time this militant liberalism “listens with sensitive ears to injuries, pressures, ideas and ideals struggling to attain presence in a crowded world”.⁷¹ It is in this context that he acknowledges agonism as indispensable to democracy and the latter as something more than a mere regime. It is also

⁷⁰ See, for example the special collection of his essays under the superscription *Routledge Innovators in Political Theory*, Samuel A. Chambers and Terrel Carver, *William E. Connolly: Democracy, Pluralism and Political Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷¹ Samuel A. Chambers, “An interview with William Connolly”, in Chambers and Carver (eds.), *William E. Connolly*, 326.

at this point that Connolly is more attentive to the contemporary condition than Mouffe. Connolly prefers the term “politics of agonistic respect” to “agonistic democracy”, for as he says “some ideals of agonistic democracy are at odds with the pursuit of deep multidimensional pluralism to the extent they reflect the spirit of Carl Schmitt more than that, say of Michael Foucault”.⁷² The difference between the two approaches, he says, lies in the ethos they bring into the field of politics. The “quality of ethos”⁷³ is paramount in Connolly’s democratic vision and I hope that by taking on his work here in a complementary reading with Mouffe’s I will be able to show the difference in this quality between the two thinkers.

This section of the chapter follows the evolution of Connolly’s distinct vocabulary and analyses how his affirmation of a political life characterised by an ethicality which is not fixed but susceptible to renegotiations and redefinitions leads him to introduce a specific political ethos. The section suggests that articulating an ethos—“most often, a set of contending dispositions”—⁷⁴ that is appropriate for the contemporary condition is at the centre of Connolly’s ethico-political project. The latter is so defined because it brings together the ethical and the political by aspiring to negotiate the tension between ethical orientation as inextricable from human life and a more general ethos pertinent to late modern democracies. Connolly weaves a vision of democracy based on the recognition of the paradox embedded in the relation between identity/difference and admiration for the fragility of things, as well as the ceaseless mobility and diversity of being that characterises this world. Democracy is inextricably bound to each of these and Connolly’s task is to refashion these tensions so that the pluralising possibilities of democracy are exposed and nourished.

For Connolly, politics is paradoxical, but this is not a matter of despair or pessimism. To define the political ethos appropriate to such a politics Connolly takes on an ethical project across two dimensions: agonistic

⁷² David Campbell and Morton Schoolman, “An interview with William Connolly”, in David Campbell and Morton Schoolman (eds.), *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 315.

⁷³ William E. Connolly, “The fragility of things”, *The Contemporary Condition Blog*, August, 16, 2010
<http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/2010/08/fragility-of-things.html>.

⁷⁴ Connolly, “The power of assemblages and the fragility of things”, 244.

respect and critical responsiveness. In discussing these two virtues I argue that ethos is indispensable to the Connollyan vision of a democracy that is not reduced to political representation; one which embraces an image inspired by complexity theory and thus appreciates the moments of disruption of this representation, the diversity of being and the inescapability of ethical orientation in every aspect of human life. The discussion also reveals how Connolly, contra Mouffe, succeeds in honouring the inner ethotic dimension of democracy. At the same time, though, I want to argue that Connolly pays inadequate attention to the collective aspect of ethos, a lack that places him on the same plane with thinkers such as Plato with reference to the aspect of ethos they honour. Even when he seems to affirm that ethos has a collective dimension as well, Connolly does so by seeing this as being in tune with the protean universe, but without paying attention to the specificity of the *kairotic* action which I argue that should be democrats' concern. Inevitably, and despite affirming its contestable character, Connolly's ethos of democracy is still a universalising and thus dictating one, since it does not abstain from projecting a code of conduct among participants in the field of the contest. Despite his intentions, Connolly falls in the same trap as Mouffe and offers an instructive account of ethos. Eventually, I conclude, both thinkers neglect the momentary aspect of the *agon* and the need to embrace an ethos pertinent to it.

Connolly's Resources and Vocabularies

Connolly is theoretically indebted to a diverse cluster of thinkers, from Spinoza to William James and from Henri Bergson to Prigogine, but his strongest and deepest influences are Nietzsche – for his affirmation of the abundance of life – and Foucault – for his care for the complex relations between identity and difference. Connolly's ontopolitical theoretical frame is a post-Nietzschean one since, although advancing a perspective that resists certain familiar readings of Nietzsche's work, Connolly stands in a relation of antagonistic indebtedness to him. He seeks in Nietzsche resources for a political theory that sustains democracy and pluralism, that is, one which, like Nietzsche, is sensitive to the complex relations between resentment and

otherness, while at the same time exploring ways to encourage the struggle against resentment caused by the inevitability of finitude.⁷⁵ Connolly's radical reading of Nietzsche, *contra* those who find him little more than the philosopher of "the will to power" and of the "overman", aims to make the most of the possibilities for affirmative ethical orientations folded in his work. It is in light of this understanding that Connolly advances his own post-Nietzscheanism to "press the spirit of liberalism into domains some liberals have yet to acknowledge to be pertinent" and to push "the politics of agonistic respect into corners that may seem unnecessary or excessive to liberal perspectives...".⁷⁶

At the same time, Connolly's Nietzscheanism leads him to appreciate like his other mentor, Foucault, the importance of the dimension of ethics not as a code of rules but as ethicality, that is "the cultivation of care for the strife and interdependence of identity/difference".⁷⁷ Connolly finds that there is a paradox lying in the heart of ethicality, one that he formulates as such: "without a set of standards of identity and responsibility there is no possibility of ethical discrimination, but the application of any such set of historical constructions also does violence to those to whom it is applied".⁷⁸ Connolly's aim, similar to that found in Nietzsche and Foucault, is not to suppress this paradox, to "bury it through a variety of onto-theological strategies" but rather to expose and cultivate it. He aspires to present an interpretation of the contemporary condition by considering the multidimensional relations between identity, life, faith, pluralism and politics. This interpretation involves two interventions towards detachment and disturbance: genealogy and deconstruction. Whereas Connolly finds that each of them alone is inadequate to support his aims, being unable to offer an affirmative interpretation of the possibilities related to the condition of pluralism relevant to late-modernity, he combines them hoping to provide a more pertinent response.

⁷⁵ Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, 175.

⁷⁶ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 29.

⁷⁷ Connolly, *Identity/ Difference*, 181.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

The first of the interventions that he resorts to is genealogy, which he affirms as being a necessary scheme of reflection and at the same time indispensable to ethicality, for it “cultivates a care for identity and difference already operative in life through accentuation of the experience of contingency”.⁷⁹ What makes this approach pertinent to the condition of pluralism is the fact that it “breaks up with [the] inertia of presumption that constantly reinstates itself as Nature, God, Law, or Purpose; it scrambles the sense of ontological necessity implicit in contingent consolidations”.⁸⁰ Connolly chooses to deploy genealogy since this approach allows him to advance an ethic of cultivation rather than a morality of command or contract; an ethic in which the process of revealing the contingencies that form identities is combined with tactical work on the self, on the relationship individuals ought to have with themselves - what Foucault describes as *rappor a soi*. Connolly is a genealogist who strives for an ethic appropriate to a world with arising and changing forces, an ethic that espouses the force of politicising by way of problematising fixed constructions and their limitations. This is why I find that Connolly provides a good example of how reflecting on an ethos of democracy demands from us to take into consideration the inner dimension that ethos bears.

Connolly also alludes to deconstruction, but he explicitly refuses to pursue its strategies, even though he acknowledges that it is an ethical project which aims at disturbance and that his own interpretations are “eminently susceptible to it”. Although he sees in deconstruction a useful tool to unveil the ubiquity of undecidability and in *difference* “a fugitive source from which an ethos of respect for the protean diversity of being might grow”⁸¹, he moves beyond the concept of the latter to expose the dynamics of systems of identity and difference. Even though he recognises the importance that a work which criticises ontological projections from the inside entails, he nevertheless aims higher: at invoking contestation of every possible projection and interpretation, an idea drawn from Nietzsche’s appreciation of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁰ William E. Connolly, “Beyond good and evil: The ethical sensibility of Michel Foucault” *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993), 376.

⁸¹ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 99.

the openness of the struggle. Mouffe, as I have discussed, also relies on deconstruction to safeguard this openness, as well as to reveal the impossibility of a consensus without exclusion and the structural undecidability that is inherent in any decision. By contrast to her optimism, though, Connolly finds that deconstruction alone cannot open this path: he needs a more positive approach that will enable him to articulate a positive account of a democratic ethos.

Genealogy and deconstruction, however necessary and relevant they might be for a democratic project that aims to detach from the terms and dispositions under which established debates are held, nevertheless prove to be insufficient to the endeavour. Connolly tries to develop a distinct interpretative strategy that borrows from the previous two but is reducible to neither of them and which he defines as a “positive ontopolitical interpretation”:

To practice this mode of interpretation, you project ontopolitical presumptions explicitly into detailed interpretations of actuality, acknowledging that your implicit projections surely exceed your explicit formulations of them and that your formulations exceed your capacity to demonstrate their truth. You challenge closure in the matrix by affirming the contestable character of your own projections, by offering readings of contemporary life that compete with alternative accounts, and by moving back and forth between these two levels.⁸²

The ontology that Connolly adopts is decisive in the formation of this approach. Even though he refuses to understand the relation between ontology and politics in the classic sense of efficient causality, he contends that the former somehow filters into the latter and so it is ubiquitous to political life.⁸³ His ontology is unique not merely because it combines elements from two different thinkers, Gilles Deleuze and William James, but for the way in which he conceives it as an ‘existential faith’, that is a “committed view of the world layered into the affective dispositions, habits

⁸² Ibid., 36.

⁸³ William E. Connolly, “The left and ontopolitics”, in Carsten Strathausen (ed.), *A Leftist Ontology: Beyond Relativism and Identity Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), x.

and institutional priorities of its confessors".⁸⁴ Such a faith is definitive of our view of the world; and the field of politics is no exception to that, since it is present in our political decisions and choices through the ethos we infuse them with, I find that a point that differentiates Connolly's work from Mouffe's is exactly the ontology that permeates his vision of democracy. Whereas Mouffe relies on a logic of lack, in that she appreciates the unattainability of a final agreement on the content of the two principles she finds central to democracy, equality and freedom, Connolly aspires to abundance.⁸⁵ It is her reliance on lack that leads her to value undecidability as the most important aspect of political life; subsequently, it is undecidability that urges her to articulate ethos as identification with the principles of freedom and equality, the content of which remains the object of controversy in the field of the contest. I will discuss how the celebration of abundance as a starting point has a significant impact on the element that Connolly honours as indispensable to his democracy, namely contestability. But before doing so, I will first give an overview of his ontology.

Connolly adopts the Deleuzian ontology of abundance, which entails the experience of the world as overflowing with materials, energies and processes of becoming too complex to be rationally divided into "subjects" and "objects".⁸⁶ This non-anthropocentric metaphysics forms Connolly's ethical source, that is, a belief in the abundance of being that exceeds any specific identity: in his faith there is a visceral attachment to life and earth, while it is acknowledged that both exceed cultural articulations of them. It is also a non-theistic, immanent metaphysics for it does not attribute any role to divine or supernatural force in the survival of nature or human culture: the universe/nature alone is already diverse enough to cultivate a gratitude for being and an ethic of care that nourishes its survival.⁸⁷ This existential faith of

⁸⁴ William E. Connolly, "Method, problem, faith", in Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, Tarek E. Masaid (eds.), *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics* (New York: Cambridge, 2004), 333.

⁸⁵ For a relevant discussion see the edited volume by Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) and especially the "Introduction".

⁸⁶ William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 88-89.

⁸⁷ William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 84-86; also William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 79-87.

immanent naturalism which appreciates the excess of possible experiences of being is enough, Connolly contends, to infuse an ethical orientation with generosity, forbearance and receptivity. The ethic supported by an immanent naturalist is one “in which visceral attachment to life and the world provides the preliminary soil from which commitment to more generous identifications, responsibilities, and connections might be cultivated”.⁸⁸ Thus it is an ethic that is cultivated, rather than ordered by a categorical imperative (as in Kant) or derived from argumentative deliberation (as in Rawls). It remains questionable, though, how such an ethical orientation towards life and the world can take a specifically political shape and become pertinent to the exigencies for and of democratic action.

Now, Connolly’s immanent naturalism is infused with the kind of contestability that he conceives of as an indispensable feature of any political concept, identity, idea or interpretation including his own and the presumptions by which they are infiltrated.⁸⁹ That said, Connolly does not expect that everyone will accept his ontopolitical view of the world; neither does he want it to be so. Following the American pragmatist William James, he embraces the idea of contestability as embedded in any creed, philosophy, faith and doctrine and he seeks to forge a positive ethos of public engagement between alternative faiths on the basis of their very contestability, acknowledged not only in the eyes of the others, but also of oneself. This entails that one must come to terms viscerally and positively with the extent to which her existential faith might appear contestable to others’ hearts and minds.⁹⁰

It is his endorsement of deep contestability that allows Connolly to precede a radical agonistic democracy that unfolds around the core of pluralism by exercising a critical mode of interpretation that is permeated by an affirmative sensibility towards the ceaseless mobility of things, the diversity of being and the unending possibilities of enhancing this plurality at

⁸⁸ Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 86.

⁸⁹ I wouldn’t go thus far as Schoolman in acknowledging contestability as a distinct critical approach along with genealogy and deconstruction, since in my reading genealogy already folds in it the contestation of fixed concepts, see Morton Schoolman, “A pluralist mind: Agonistic respect and the problem of violence toward difference”, in Campbell and Schoolman (eds.), *The New Pluralism*, 17-61.

⁹⁰ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 32.

levels and dimensions so far unexplored. I find Connolly's embrace of contestability illuminating for the kind of democracy that I support in the thesis: to accept the contestability of your views is to accept the multifaceted nature of democracy and of the democratic *agon*, as well as the multiple possibilities for taking action within its context. It is a scheme that we have already seen developed by Protagoras in Chapter Two: in the public field of the *agon*, each and every opinion is contestable. At the same time, though, I find that the element of undecidability honoured by Mouffe, an element to which she is drawn due to her affirmative stance towards the idea of lack, is equally important in helping one to identify with diverse struggles, a stance I find crucial with reference to the function of late modern democracy. The *metical* ethos I espouse in the thesis (see Chapter Six) is therefore open to both these elements.

Identity/Difference and Contingency in Connolly's Work

The relation of identity to difference, what Connolly refers to as “the site of two problems of evil”, is at the core of his ethico-political vision since, as he contends, “identity, in some modality or other, is an indispensable feature of human life”.⁹¹ Despite its ubiquity in modern life, it entails a paradoxical logic, according to which a complex relation between identity and difference exists, a relation of conflict and at the same time interdependence, for “identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty”.⁹² That is, unlike Mouffe's assertion that identity is always-already difference, Connolly sees a more complex association between them, a systemic one, an account that I also endorse in my discussion in Chapter Six. Given the dual relation of ceaseless interchange and strife between the two, the possibility that this interdependence can take multifaceted forms, as well as the presumption that no identity can claim to be natural or true, power is always present in systems of identity/difference. There is no way to escape identities, be they personal or collective, but in order to justify these identities as true we need

⁹¹ Connolly, *Identity and Difference*, 158.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 64.

to step on differences which we convert into otherness and then otherness into scapegoats. Identity is relational, biocultural and collective and it struggles to marginalise or exclude the differences through which it is established, to make space for its fullness: "To establish an identity is to create social and conceptual space for it to be in ways that impinge on the spaces available to other possibilities".⁹³ However, this paradox entails a positivity in that it is something efficacious that exceeds conceptual reach. We need to compromise with this paradox, if we are to support a democratic politics that moves towards the acceptance of the importance of pluralism: "To come to terms *affirmatively* with the complexity of the connection between identity and difference (to confess a particular identity is also to belong to difference) is to support an ethos of identity and difference suitable to a democratic culture of deep pluralism".⁹⁴ Pluralism, if it is to be sustained and flourish, needs a specific ethical sensibility.

A distinct dimension of Connolly's reading of identity is the trait of contingency that he attributes to it. Contrary to other political theorists who see contingency as an accidental and somehow unavoidable and negative event, Connolly's Nietzschean approach enables him to conceive it as a positive evolution that has a focal position in his theoretical formations. He identifies the central problem of identity politics to be the demand, by some theorists, for unity and consensus:

Intensive pressure for unity, consensus, and normality manufactures new abnormalities, to which idealists of unity then respond by... demanding more unity. The way to loosen the boundaries of that circle is to render prevailing standards of identity more alert to incorrigible elements of difference, incompleteness and contingency within them.⁹⁵

For Connolly identity is always contingent, since its constitution depends on various factors, to which it can be in harmony or conflict, with some of them having a more significant contribution to the formation of an identity. Although any identity entails the element of contingency, there are particularly

⁹³ Ibid., 160.

⁹⁴ Ibid., xiv.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 172-3.

problematic identities possessing branded or entrenched contingencies—those “that ha[ve] become instinctive”—which usually lead to the repression of difference, because we tend to either ethicise/universalise them on the grounds that they flow from a true identity or purge them because they aren't worth enough to be ethicised.⁹⁶ Either way, treating entrenched contingencies with a tendency towards normalisation and moralisation is a decisive component of loathing difference and thus transforming it to otherness and finally to something that must be defeated or marginalised. We have seen how Mouffe, drawing on the Derridean idea of the constitutive outside, also affirms the contingency of every identity and the need to draw frontiers that safeguard democracy and pluralism. Such limits also preserve the *agon* for they prevent an agent from taking mastery of the foundation of society, which is the Nietzschean idea of the *agon*.

The paradoxical relation between identity/difference is prevalent in Connolly's vision of democracy, the latter being folded around a paradox that he summarises as follows: “If democracy is a medium through which difference can establish space for itself as alter-identity, it is also a means by which the dogmatisation of identity can be politically legitimised”.⁹⁷ For Connolly, as for Mouffe, democracy has an ambiguous character: it leaves space for exposure of the relational character of identity/ difference, and this is both its virtue and danger. While the danger lies in the always present possibility that a dogmatic identity will be able to gain hegemony and suppress the others, its virtue is that democracy is the only form of organisation that will also enable a counteraction.

Connolly's democratic project is developed around the recognition of democracy's paradoxical nature and it aims, on the one hand, to modify the terms of the current debate around democracy and democratic theory while, on the other, allowing the disclosure of under-appreciated virtues of democracy. That said, he introduces a political imaginary that responds to this paradox by embracing the indispensability of issues of identity and the good for politics and integrating them into the public dialogue, aiming thus at politicising instead of neutralising them.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 177.

⁹⁷ Ibid., x.

Already in his early writings Connolly was critical not only of the aggregative mode of theorising democracy, but of democratic models in general, since he found them insufficient to grasp the tension between the diverse moments of paradoxical democratic politics. More specifically, he contends that the distinction between normative/descriptive statements is blind to the normative points of view already inherent in concepts underpinning the actions analysed. By contrast, he suggests, there is a more complex relation between a problem and the method used for it to be addressed, where the issue of existential faith is unavoidable.⁹⁸ Theorists who attend to democracy instead of attempting to offer explanatory, descriptive or interpretative models, could benefit from the appreciation of a more loose-cannon articulation of the terms that describe their preferred methods, while at the same time valuing the ever presence of their faith in the performance of their academic tasks. It is only then that the reworking of democracy can be productive and effective.

Refashioning democracy entails also reconsidering its relation with the sovereign state and the territorial imaginary that this is bound with, especially when bearing in mind the challenge of globalisation and the suffocating pressures that the idea of a contiguous territory places on relations of identity/difference and thus on democracy. On this account, the alternative democratic vision that Connolly seeks to conceptualise is one “that distributes democratic energies and identifications across multiple sites, treating the state as one site of identification, allegiance, and action among others”.⁹⁹ This cosmopolitan, multidimensional account notwithstanding, Connolly does not seek to depreciate the role of governance played by the state: his democratic vision is not indifferent towards the role of democratic institutions in mobilising possibilities for a more generous treatment of difference. Although he concurs with Foucault on the necessity of a democratic theory that criticises consensus both when absent and present,

⁹⁸ Connolly, “Method, problem, faith” in Shapiro, Smith, Masoud (eds), *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, 332-349

⁹⁹ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 137.

he breaks with the Foucauldian detachment from political action through the state, in fear of it becoming too representative of a single identity:

The risk of the state becoming a nation-state is always there [...]. But these risks must be run and resisted by those committed to a pluralizing democracy; *we must include the state as one key site of political action among others*¹⁰⁰ (emphasis added)

Consensus, then, is a constitutive element in Connolly's democratic imaginary. However, it is a consensus on the ambiguity of democracy, a consensus about the "contestability of contending presumptions about the fundamental character of being".¹⁰¹ Hence its ironic character.

Connolly's interest in refashioning the pluralist imagination is inextricably connected to his ethical and thus to his democratic project. He problematises this imagination for being "still haunted by ghosts that it seeks to exorcise", mainly for being "too stingy, cramped and defensive for the world we now inhabit",¹⁰² but also for entailing the image of pluralism as a fundamental that must be protected. Connolly problematises this protectionism by affirming it as leading to conservatism through the exclusion of new drives, for they are considered as endangering pluralism, hindering thus its *pluralisation*. According to Connolly, this dissonant relation between pluralism and pluralisation is the constitutive tension of pluralist politics and his work is attentive to this tension seeking to renegotiate it. Connolly contends that the answer lies in a *rhizomatic* pluralism, since this "would generate a general ethos of generosity and forbearance among its elements from multiple sources rather than from a single, exclusionary taproot".¹⁰³ This distinct pluralist imaginary draws on the Deleuzian image of the rhizome, where the enhancement of diversity in one sector can expand in other levels of life, resulting in the creation of majority assemblages. These assemblages will be rhizomatic being "linked through multiple lines of connection, rather than unified by a central political idea or ethical principle which all participants

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰² Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, xii.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 94.

endorse together. Such [assemblages] support the expansion of plurality...".¹⁰⁴ Participation in these assemblages, then, is achieved for diverse reasons, so that they have not the form of a general consensus but a more dynamic one of a loose mobile constellation of constituencies which are held together for different reasons, without, though, aiming at a deep-rooted and necessarily continuous collaboration. Hence its rhizomatic instead of arboreal form. The terms that govern the gathering of these assemblages are subject to persistent renegotiation and therefore change; so that the success of rhizomatic pluralism rests on its constituencies' willingness to come to terms with the paradoxical nature of the identity/difference relation.

The endeavour of pluralising pluralism does not imply a pluralism with no limits, for, as Connolly says, "no such beast is possible".¹⁰⁵ Like Mouffe, Connolly sees boundaries and exclusions as necessary in order "to ensure that an exclusionary, unitarian movement does not take over an entire regime".¹⁰⁶ Concurrently, these limits demonstrate the fragility of pluralism itself: their absence can put it in danger, while their presence may drive it to defeat. Their necessity, though, is dictated by the possibility that any constituency may evolve into a fundamentalist, concentric regime. However, the most important feature of the limits posed on pluralism by its own defenders is their contestable character. Pluralists never set final limits and they always acknowledge the necessity of reconsidering already existing ones.

Connolly contends that politics pervades social life and thus the relation between identity and difference, but he questions the unchangeability of the element of power as ubiquitous in this relation. His democratic project, then, is founded upon the conviction that acknowledgement of identity's contingency and contestability can somehow alter the ethical quality of political life. The latter is characterised by an ethicality which is not fixed and its content can be defined and redefined. As he puts it,

¹⁰⁴ William E. Connolly, "The Ethos of democratization", in Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart (eds), *Laclau: A Critical Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 168.

¹⁰⁵ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 178.

¹⁰⁶ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 42.

it is necessary to find political means by which to expose the dependence of dogmatic identities upon the differences they vilify [...] Such a politicisation of dogmatic identities forms an essential prelude to the effort to devise creative ways through which a wider variety of identities can negotiate less violent terms of coexistence.¹⁰⁷

For Connolly, to politicise is to disturb established norms, modes of identification and relations. He is driven to this idea by way of embracing an image of a world where speed, contingency, excess and mutation are appreciated as its indispensable elements and by embracing an understanding of time as durational instead of linear, that is a world of becoming. Pertinent to such a world of becoming he finds what he articulates as a politics of becoming: “that politics by which a constituency or agenda that had been ill-formed, scattered or impugned, finds leverage to push its way onto the scene of official contestation”.¹⁰⁸ Thus it is also a politics of enactment. Such a politics is paradoxical, for

before success the new movement is likely to be judged [by authoritative constituencies] in those terms through which it is already depreciated, and after success a new identity emerges that exceeds the very energies and identifications that spurred it into being.¹⁰⁹

Despite its fragility, while it struggles against the forces that resist its positive articulation, as well as the possibility of its generating a negative constituency, the politics of becoming upon its success manages “to shake up something in the established world” and “to propel a fork in political time” and also to throw “a wrench into the established code of obligation, goodness, identity, justice, right, or legitimacy”.¹¹⁰ It is Connolly’s conviction that solely the perspective of disturbance and rearrangement deserves the effort. However, this is a point that Mouffe attacks in Connolly the most. For as she holds, disturbance as a method or technique is inadequate to the radicalisation of the prevailing liberal paradigm. Rather than engaging with

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁰⁸ William E. Connolly, “A world of becoming”, in Alan Finlayson (ed), *Democracy and Pluralism: The Political Thought of William E. Connolly* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 226.

¹⁰⁹ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 192.

¹¹⁰ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 122.

permanent disruption and decentering, like Connolly does, Mouffe contends that one needs to be attentive to the moment of exclusion that is necessary in order to draw the limits and thus protect pluralism and democracy.¹¹¹ By contrast, she believes that her *disassociative* approach allows her to attend to exclusion as a necessary part of the political terrain and thus appreciate the moment of determination of political identification on which democratic ethos is brought to the fore.¹¹² To be sure, Connolly develops a unique pathway towards introducing the pertinence of ethos to democracy. This is the object of analysis in what follows.

Agonistic Respect and Critical Responsiveness

Connolly's liberalism is a vitalised one: it endorses and politicises elements that other liberalisms ignore. It is also a post-fundamentalist liberalism in the sense that it is willing to acknowledge the contestability of its own fundamentals, even those regarding its conceptions of morality. The issue that arises, though, upon the recognition of the significance and then of the complexity of the politics of becoming is the kind of political and more specifically civic virtues, the kind of ethos, appropriate to such a politics. The ethical project undertaken by Connolly in order to sustain this vision of democracy is one that does not intend to "take politics out of ethics", or to "rise above politics"; rather, it is one that "lend[s] an ethical dimension to the experience of identity, the practice of faith, the promotion of self-interest, and the engagements of politics".¹¹³ Unlike the theorists scrutinised in Chapter Three, then, Connolly aims to deploy the ethical dimension he finds pertinent to political issues, without falling into a moralisation of the political field. In so doing, Connolly develops this ethical project across two dimensions:

¹¹¹ Chantal Mouffe, "Agonistic pluralism between politics and ethics" *Lecture at the New School of Social Research*, June, 4, 2007 <http://www.discoursenotebook.com/audio/CM04-06-2007.mp3>.

¹¹² The distinction between associative and disassociative thinkers is introduced by Oliver Marchart in his discussion of the political in *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 38-44.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 122.

agonistic respect and a critical responsiveness to new drives to pluralisation. After introducing them, I will critically discuss them.

Agonistic respect, the first of the civic virtues forming a democratic ethos, “allows people to honour different final sources, to cultivate reciprocal respect across difference, and to negotiate larger assemblages to set general policies”.¹¹⁴ Agonistic respect and tolerance are kissing cousins, but not equivalent, since the latter presupposes a relation between a majority and a minority that is tolerated. By contrast, agonistic respect is a relation developed between interdependent partisans who contest the fundamentals of others’ faiths, but also appreciate the contestability of their own fundamentals. It is a kind of virtue that probably Protagoras would also embrace and find pertinent to the field of the *agon*. The common source out of which such a respect can flow is, according to Connolly, care for the protean diversity of life and nature, the acknowledgement that they both exceed cultural and creedal identifications and discourses motivated by human beings for their articulation. In forming agonistic respect, the element of agonism enters respect in a balanced relation in a dual sense: “you *absorb the agony* of having elements of your own faith called into question by others, and you *fold agonistic contestation* of others into the respect that you convey toward them”.¹¹⁵ Given its nature, in order for it to flourish, agonistic respect must be reciprocal. This mutuality does not flow from an agreement on common procedures or common sources of justice; rather, it flows from the belief that “the deepest wellsprings of human inspiration are to date susceptible to multiple interpretations”.¹¹⁶ And this gives to agonistic respect its public aspect.

Its crucial role in the engagement of partisan constituencies notwithstanding, agonistic respect cannot alone support the politics of becoming and the expansive forces of rhizomatic pluralism. While the process of pluralisation is still under way, also pertinent is the virtue of critical responsiveness. In Connolly’s words, while agonistic respect “speaks to relations between already crystallised constituencies”, critical responsiveness

¹¹⁴ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, xxvi.

¹¹⁵ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 123-4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

“speaks to the relation a crystallized constituency pursues to a disqualified minority struggling to migrate from an obscure or negated place below the register of legitimate identity to a place on that register”.¹¹⁷ This second political virtue is related, then, to the paradoxical nature of the politics of becoming and to our receptivity to new movements, identities, faiths and voices and it thus takes the form of *careful listening* and *presumptive generosity*.¹¹⁸ Most importantly, and unlike the virtues suggested by Rawls, Taylor and Young, critical responsiveness not only is never reduced to a code; it also seeks to form a response to such universalising codes of justice, harmony and differentiated citizenship. That said, critical responsiveness is a virtue that aims to be relevant to the ongoing changes taking place in a fast-paced world, instead of aiming to safeguard constituencies that are already there. It is for this reason that what characterizes the ethos of critical responsiveness is: *anticipation*, for it reacts to a new movement before it is consolidated into a positive identity; *criticism*, because it must foresee whether the new movement includes elements of fundamentalism; *self-revisionism*, in that it is open to reconsideration in case the new movement finally crystallizes into a positive identity.¹¹⁹

In bearing these three traits, the ethos of critical responsiveness ensures that the limits that are put on pluralism are subject to a continuous reappraisal, so that they never crystallise into a general and accepted constant. Hence its importance for the politics of pluralisation, but also for the task undertaken in the thesis: if we are to form an idea of how a democratic ethos responsive to the peculiarities of the moment would look, then critical responsiveness must have a place in this vision.

Agonistic respect and critical responsiveness mediate the paradoxical relation between identity and difference and together form a democratic ethos appropriate to the accelerating politics of becoming. However, they both demand a twofold attention: not only do they need cultivation through tactical work on what Connolly defines as the visceral register; they also demand continuous public negotiation so that they remain sensitive and

¹¹⁷ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, xxviii.

¹¹⁸ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 126.

¹¹⁹ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 184.

receptive to the calls of a world of becoming. The work on the self that Connolly has in mind is not inspired by, say, the Epicureans, for it is not restricted to self-indulgence; rather, it is Nietzschean-inspired and contributes to a richer understanding of ethical sources. Moreover, such a democratic ethos of enactment with these traits in order to be cultivated and sustained needs a sense of reciprocity and more specifically of agonistic reciprocity, where,

agents of enactment would exercise a certain *forbearance* in pressing their claims, and agents of reception would exercise a reciprocal *generosity* in responding to productions that disturb what they are.¹²⁰

Maintaining a certain respect for the adversary does not entail that one needs to reduce her own claims to those of the adversary, but that she needs to resist and challenge them. Agonism is vital for a democratic politics.

Criticism and Limitations

Connolly's elaborations of democratic ethos do not go without criticism, though. His attentiveness to ethical orientation and work on the self has been accused of being characterised by "institutional deficit", both in terms of its critiques of existing arrangements and in terms of their more positive alternatives.¹²¹ In fact, it is argued, his claim that an agonistic model of democracy could foster greater inclusion of diverse citizens and mutual respect between their communities remains an arbitrary one, at least as long as nothing about the functioning of agonistic institutions is specified.¹²² Moreover, Connolly's commitment to generosity as the source for an agonistic respect that will inform democratic politics is confronted for being too restricted, while alternatively the role played by negative affects such as resentment in fostering democratic struggles and in cultivating a democratic

¹²⁰ Ibid., 193.

¹²¹ David Howarth, "Ethos, agonism and populism: William Connolly and the case for radical democracy" *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10, no. 2 (2008), 189.

¹²² Monique Deveaux, "Agonism and pluralism" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 25, no. 4 (1999), 14.

ethos is stressed.¹²³ In a stronger sense, he has been accused of favouring a “culturalist conception of democracy”, of “reducing the role of democracy to an ethos” and altogether of embracing an elitist account of democracy that in fact address only those who are already equal by belonging to a privileged class of liberals.¹²⁴

Among the critiques of Connolly’s formulations one of the most prominent is the line of argument articulated by Stephen K. White. White follows Connolly in valuing political generosity as a crucial ethical value in the processes of dampening hostility to diversity and moderating of one’s normalising expectations. However, at the same time this is a significant point where White departs from Connolly. For even though he finds it relevant to late-modern developments, such as the expansion of the middle class and its susceptibility to fundamentalising appeals and resentment, and even though he affirms Connolly’s formulation of generosity as critical responsiveness as involving “aesthetic-affective dynamics” that other radical approaches to democracy fail to grasp;¹²⁵ and even though he finds it being embedded in an agonistic portrait of life which he also understands as best depicting the process of becoming,¹²⁶ he problematises the indiscriminate, as he characterises it, generosity that Connolly embraces. He suggests that the reliance of Connolly’s ethico-political project on the central ontological figure of abundance is problematic, since he finds this figure inadequate to ground the ethical qualities Connolly wants to assign to critical responsiveness.¹²⁷ That is, White problematises Connolly’s affirmation of abundance as an adequate ontological figuration that can sustain and indeed promote the politics of becoming, since no care for human being flows from a “protean care for the abundance of life” as Connolly embraces it. Rather, White wants

¹²³ Moya Lloyd, “Hate, loathing and political theory: Thinking with and against William Connolly”, in A. Finlayson (ed.), *Democracy and Pluralism*, 114-128.

¹²⁴ Antonio Y. Vazquez-Arroyo, “Agonized liberalism: The liberal theory of William E. Connolly” *Radical Philosophy* 127 (2004), 8-19.

¹²⁵ Stephen K. White, “Three conceptions of the political: The real world of late modern democracy” in A. Botwinick and W.E. Connolly (eds), *Democracy and Vision*, 181.

¹²⁶ Stephen K. White, “Ethos and late-modern democracy” in A. Finlayson (ed.), *Democracy and Pluralism*, 49.

¹²⁷ Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 127.

a more emphatic and more direct link between the ontological and the ethical-political, which is a more clear distinction between the sheer “abundance of human presencing per se and presencing that calls us to respect equal dignity”.¹²⁸ This is the reason that White needs to go back to his own ontological figures and search for the crucial one that allows him to delineate human subjectivity and to draw this line of distinction he finds absent in Connolly.

The importance of these criticisms notwithstanding, I believe there is another line of discussion that can be developed across Connolly’s work on an ethos for democracy. This discussion is related to his honouring only one component of ethos, that is the individual, and which I believe creates serious shortcomings for his ethico-political project. Connolly advances a biocultural reading of identity by attending to the interchanges between natural sciences and cultural theory, two fields kept separate for various reasons but brought closer in the course of the development of complexity theory.¹²⁹ Following the Nietzschean idea of “self-artistry” he attends to a series of techniques of working on the self which can signal the direction of a richer understanding of ethical sources. These techniques can be then collectivised and politicised through the Deleuzian idea of micropolitics, “that interplay between image, rhythm, words and perception on the media and elsewhere which plays an indispensable role in politics writ large”.¹³⁰ Micropolitics invades and pervades macropolitics by allowing the development of strategies that challenge and contest the latter. Agonism, then, is folded into the arts of both the self and micropolitics, for example in fighting against existential resentment.

I believe there are two problems here. Although I find that the appreciation of these techniques is indispensable to the development of a democratic ethos on the inner level, I believe that by relying exclusively on them for the cultivation of his two ethico-political virtues Connolly does not take into consideration the interplay between those techniques and the impact of community and thus ignores the mediating role that ethos has between the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹²⁹ Connolly, “A world of becoming”, in A. Finlayson (ed), *Democracy and Pluralism*, 223.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 224.

individual and the collective aspect of democracy. As White help us to see, then, Connolly is eager to explicate a democratic ethos that is tuned to the protean universe. This eagerness, despite giving a certain outer account to Connolly's vision of ethos, does not enable him to attend to the importance of the very moment of enactment of ethos in course of the democratic action. That said, and unlike, let's say, Foucault, Connolly does not provide an account of how his two virtues are enacted in accordance with or in the occasion of collective democratic action. Mouffe, with her attentiveness to the coercion that takes place through the process of agonistic engagement, proves helpful here. This is an aspect that I see as folded in my account of the *metical* democratic ethos, mainly the several tactics that one may need to employ in order to gain ground in the field of the *agon*.

The second problem is related to the cultivation of these dispositions. It appears to be more of something that one does on oneself for his one sake and benefit and that can take place in abstraction from common or shared concerns. That is, there does not seem to be an outer aspect of ethos that urges one to engage in the process of cultivation, so the relevance to democracy here remains questionable. At the same time the question is posed as to why one would bother to engage into a process of cultivation of these two specific sensibilities and prefer them to others, lets say to listening or corporeal traveling as theorised by Romand Coles.¹³¹ I find that Connolly, his embrace of contestability notwithstanding, ends up to offer a code of proper democratic conduct, exactly like Mouffe does. By contrast, I suggest that a democratic ethos is not exhausted to a set of principles or dispositions, but is characterised by fluidity and plasticity: it remains attuned only to the challenges of the moment of the democratic *agon*.

These critiques, while revealing the limits and weaknesses of Connolly's work, are important because they have contributed significantly to the evolution of his ideas and have urged further elaborations of his critical project. For example, his recent turn to capitalist democracy and the complex ways that religion and political parties interact with neoliberal capitalist powers seeks not only to problematise but also indicate how to tackle the

¹³¹ Romand Coles, "Moving democracy: Industrial areas, foundation social movements and the political arts of listening, traveling, and tabling" *Political Theory* 32, no. 5 (2004), 678-705.

issues arising from these interconnections; such a turn comes to remedy the critique of “institutional deficit” attributed to him.¹³² It is by way of response to his critics that Connolly was forced to push his ideas, elaborations and conceptualisations further and offer us today a rich and valuable source of thinking and acting against capitalist democracy and in favour of a *different* democracy. At the same time, he showed how regular institutions and “experts” are in several cases inadequate to respond to the turmoil, uncertainty and disarray caused by the complexity and fluidity of the world.¹³³ In any case, these critiques are valuable because, most importantly, they are indicative of the abundant nature of democracy, the countless possibilities of articulations regarding it and the ethos permeating its institutions and practices, as well as theory’s inefficacy to interpret events.

IV. Agonistic Democracy: For an Alternative Democratic Ethos

The purpose of this chapter was to show how theorists of democracy who embrace the virtues and challenges of the *agon* also, and necessarily, attend to ethos as a crucial aspect of their democratic imaginary: indeed as its very pillar. As I have shown, both Mouffe and Connolly rework the liberal democratic imaginary in ways that emphasise its adversarial aspect, seeking to bring to the fore the dynamics resulting from differences, and to advance a radical democratic agenda transforming antagonisms into agonisms and fusing an ethical factor with the democratic process. In so doing, they do not settle with a moralisation of the political in that manner of, as we saw in Chapter Three, Rawls, Taylor and Young. In fact, both Connolly and Mouffe severely criticise Liberals and Communitarians for this and try to avoid the trap of offering moral codes and modes of “appropriate” democratic conduct in their efforts to resist established norms and the articulation of ethos as morality.

¹³² Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity*, William E. Connolly, “The radical right, the extreme right and the republican party” *The Contemporary Condition Blog*, January, 13, 2011 <http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/2011/01/radical-right-extreme-right-and.html>.

¹³³ William E. Connolly, “The politics of the event” *The Contemporary Condition Blog*, April, 3, 2011 <http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/2011/04/politics-of-event.html>.

However, as we have seen, both Mouffe and Connolly end up suggesting an account of ethos that is quite restricted. For Mouffe, a democratic ethos involves identification with (liberal) democratic citizenship, something that sets limitations on her account of the democratic subject. Connolly, on the other hand, identifies democratic ethos with two principles that form an ethic rooted in democrats' visceral register. In both cases, despite their intentions, these formulations of an ethos of democracy are prescriptive. They conceive ethos in very stable terms and they fail to recognise its fluidity and adaptability elements that, as we shall see in Chapter Six, will prove beneficial with regard to the exploitation of the moment of the democratic *agon*. The approach I develop in the final chapter aims to provide exactly an account of democratic ethos that brings to the fore the importance of the attunement of the ethic to the temporal specificity of democratic action and thus to its dual tactical dimension.

I believe that despite their similarities, analysed above, Connolly and Mouffe articulate two different visions of democracy and democratic ethos due to the fact that they draw inspiration from two different sources, namely lack for Mouffe and abundance for Connolly. The espousal of the elements of undecidability and lack of a final ground brings Mouffe close, I think, to "a line of transcendence". More specifically, it can be argued that Mouffe actually embraces what Laclau has described as "failed transcendence", a transcendence with the form of the presence of an absence.¹³⁴ Democracy fills in this lack through the creation of a chain of equivalence among democratic struggles, that is through the creation of a common political identity among democratic subjects, a common ethos of democratic citizenship. The formation of such an ethos is, according to Mouffe, the premise for the maintenance of liberal-democratic institutions and of a liberal-democratic logic of justice.¹³⁵ In order for this goal to be attained we should focus not on the "fact of pluralism", on how to cultivate tolerance among different constituencies and on how to succeed in achieving social harmony. Avoiding the moralisation of the political proffered by deliberative democrats and its ethicalisation sought by some post-modernists, Mouffe suggests the

¹³⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 244.

¹³⁵ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 69.

mobilisation of passions that people already comply with. Contra Connolly, Mouffe does not engage in an elaboration of sensibilities that would then have to be proved relevant to democracy. Neither does she ask for more democracy: the very negation of its possibility is the key. Her vision lingers around a democracy where both liberty and equality cannot be perfectly realised. However this is not a reason for despair, but rather the very condition of possibility for a pluralist form of human coexistence in which rights can exist and be exercised, in which freedom and equality can somehow manage to coexist. The condition of radical democracy's possibility is the impossibility of its perfect implementation.

Connolly, on the other hand, believes that the key to safeguarding liberal democracy is in pluralising its possibilities. That is, he understands democracy as being inherently and necessarily pluralistic, but not in the way that conventional pluralist theory does. Instead he tries to adapt the pluralist ideal to the political conditions, he affirms pluralism as too complicated and excessive, as *multidimensional*, and thus as being irreducible to any political interpretation. He is driven to this understanding by an ontology of immanent naturalism, that is, a non-theistic gratitude for the rich diversity of being and a care for the world we inhabit. This ethical source informs a democratic vision in which multidimensional pluralism coexists with the creation of majority assemblages that would work for a common purpose such as the reduction of economic inequalities and with the acknowledgement of numerous lines of affinity and interdependence between human beings and non-human nature.¹³⁶ Connolly's pluralist imagination is a political process where a loose constellation of constituencies which are held together for different reasons, without, though, aiming at a deep-rooted and necessarily continuous collaboration, seek to cause disturbance in the prevailing order, but without disparaging or aiming at its extermination.

Connolly does not expect that his existential faith of non-theistic gratitude is going to seize political life by way of everyone affirming it. In his democratic imaginary it is enough that everyone affirms that there is a multiplicity of ethical sources in political life and that each one of those, including the one she embraces, carries the element of contestability. The

¹³⁶ Connolly, "Immanence, abundance, democracy", 253.

dimension of agonism is crucial in this approach to democracy, since it opens political spaces for agonistic relations of adversarial respect. However, it is a democratic agonism that does not exhaust social space; it leaves room for other modalities of attachment and detachment through the cultivation of agonistic respect between interlocking and contending constituencies. The nomadic element is a crucial aspect of the democratic ethos that Connolly envisages for the late-modern condition. Such elements or movements

periodically interrupt centered cultural presumptions so that the element of power, artifice, and contingency in these all too readily naturalised norms becomes more palpable, so that voices defined as (interior, internal, external) Others in the established order of things can locate cultural space to contest some of these definitions, so that new combinations emerging out of these disturbances can develop agonistic respect for one another in changing contexts of interdependency.¹³⁷

It is by affirming the role of nomadism in politics that a democratic ethos mediates between the dimension of statist democracy and the challenge of any constellations of identities that tend to be solidified. More than a form of governance, democracy is an ethic itself.

The parallel discussion of the work of Connolly and Mouffe attempted in this chapter reveals the significant differences in their democratic visions concerning issues of ontology, theoretical sources and the vocabularies they choose in order to articulate their imaginaries. To be sure, the two theorists stand in a constructive dialogue with each other, with Mouffe being more eager to differentiate herself from Connolly (and other agonists). As I have already discussed, she finds that Connolly is too concerned with preventing closure and keeping identities and practices open to challenges and disruption and that he spends too little time on the need for a moment of exclusion.¹³⁸ She also condemns disturbance as a method or technique as being inadequate for the radicalisation of the prevailing liberal paradigm, which is the aim of her project. But I have suggested that Mouffe is also

¹³⁷ Ibid., 179.

¹³⁸ Chantal Mouffe, "Agonistic pluralism between politics and ethics" [Lecture at the *New School of Social Research*]. Retrieved from <http://www.discoursenotebook.com/audio/CM04-06-2007.mp3>

eager to safeguard the perpetuity of the contest. Connolly on his behalf suggests that Mouffe's conceptualisation of ethos needs to be infused by a positive conception of ethics and more specifically by an ethic of positive engagement, if it is going to sustain pluralism as she hopes; that the conception of decisionism she adopts to support her vision necessarily emphasises more exclusion than openness; and, most importantly, that her ethos of democratic citizenship is grounded in already constituted practices which she hopes that we will adopt.¹³⁹ At the very end, Mouffe exchanges the contestability of her political vision for an ethic too strongly supported.

This exchange between the two thinkers is informative. It indicates not their differences with regard to ethos but also the complementarity of their democratic endeavours. Neither provides justification for the view that their 'assemblage' or 'chain of equivalence' would create a new hegemony that would be more preferable than the prevailing one. That is, there is no evidence as to why a constituency formed between otherwise diverse constituencies that find a fugitive moment of commonality would establish a new political condition that would be necessarily successful in articulating democratic claims. Connolly is, I believe, more attentive to the specific ways in which an ethos suitable for democracy can be cultivated and permeate political structures; he relies on techniques of the self and micropolitics and he even explores neuroscience to show how political ideas and motivations are layered and subject to personal work on the visceral register. In Connolly, contrary to Mouffe, there is no need "to roll back into the strategies of conquest, conversion, community or tolerance",¹⁴⁰ without this move entailing that he wants to eliminate them as possible forms of human relations. Connolly is attentive to the dual nature of the tactical dimension of ethos: it both needs tactical work if it is to thrive, like Foucault argues, but at the same time it also needs to be sustained by tactics such as conversion. Only that Mouffe is more alert on the importance of conversion in late-modern democracy, a dimension that my approach of a *metical* democratic ethos also embraces. Mouffe, on the other hand, fails to address the transformative

¹³⁹ William E. Connolly, "Twilight of the idols" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, no 3 (1995), 127-138.

¹⁴⁰ Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 179.

moves which need to take place on the ethical level if a radical pluralist democracy is to thrive. Although she affirms the indispensability of the dimension of an ethic in democracy, her commitment to liberalism as the condition for pluralism leads her to privilege a particular ethico-political form, a task that drains her project from a more generous approach to plurality. Still, Mouffe with her civic republicanism is closer in appreciating the collective dimension of an ethos that is supposed to be democratic.

It is in these terms that I have suggested that the projects of the two thinkers can be more productively read in a complementary way. Mouffe's agonistic pluralism and the space for democratic citizenship that it creates needs to be infused with principles such as those endorsed by Connolly, namely agonistic respect and critical responsiveness, in order for her vision of radical democratic citizenship to be sustained. If democratic struggles are to have the form of a "chain of equivalence" or "assemblage", then mere adherence to the principles of equality and liberty is insufficient to regulate the type of relations among participants in these struggles. A more generous and responsive ethic is required so that the relations between the different constituencies forming them be infused with agonism.

The two democratic visions scrutinised in this chapter run the risk of becoming an ideal in the place of the ideals they seek to challenge. However, their complementary reading allows the formulation of a promising image regarding the form of a democratic ethic. Connolly envisages as appropriate to democracy an ethos that indeed has a civic character: one that is forged by the renegotiation of virtues by diverse faiths and that subsequently "must become embedded in numerous institutional practices for a positive ethos of pluralism to be".¹⁴¹ A democratic citizenry connected on certain occasions through action, in the way envisioned by Mouffe, yet also permeated by principles of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness as suggested by Connolly, could have a pivotal role in late modernity. An agonistic approach to democracy can help us better construe the dynamics of pluralism and envisage an ethos that is attainable by and indispensable to democratic life. Even more illuminating of the political condition in our late modern world can

¹⁴¹ Connolly, *Pluralism*, 65.

be the re-capturing of democracy in its specificity at the moment of acting. Such is the perspective of radical thinkers who pertain to democracy in its fugitive, temporary and hence experiential dimension. This is the context within which the two theorists scrutinised in the next chapter proceed and develop their democratic visions.

Chapter 5

The Radical Democracy of Sheldon Wolin and Jacques Rancière: An Encounter

As we have seen, the turn towards radical articulations of democracy is the outcome of a critique of the consensual democratic systems that are synonymous with liberal democracy in the contemporary world. However, whereas thinkers such as Mouffe and Connolly emphasise the agonistic/agonised dimension of politics, other theorists of radical democracy centre their efforts on conceptualising the temporal and spatial dimensions of democracy. This shift in emphasis has important effects. Because of the prominence they give to the inescapability of pluralised contestation Mouffe and Connolly are driven to theorise the ethos through which people accommodate themselves to this condition. But when temporal and spatial specificity becomes the centre of attention theories of radical democracy instead emphasise how people act democratically. I find that it is this second form of radical democratic theory that is most pertinent to my vision of a *metical* democratic ethos, that is one that is attuned to the temporal summons of the democratic *agon*.

The two thinkers explored in this chapter exemplify this second category of radical democrat for whom the foundation of a liberal democratic state is also the suppression of possibilities for the mobilisation of ordinary people in defence of equality. To be sure, Sheldon S. Wolin and Jacques Rancière are two thinkers with very different backgrounds: the first is a well-established American political philosopher writing in the context of, and against, “the oldest democracy in the world”; the second is a Continental thinker who moves easily between different disciplines (cinema, theatre, historiography as well as political theory) and does not place his work in any specific geographical context. Their language varies significantly, from the more pragmatic depiction of the American economic-political environment found in Wolin to the philosophico-aesthetic discourse mobilised by Rancière. The present chapter brings these radical thinkers together despite their different styles and approaches - or rather because of it. As we will see each shares in

the effort to explore and affirm the importance of the temporal and experiential aspect of democracy.

There is a certain agony that Wolin and Rancière share, concerning the present status of democracy in the corporate (Wolin) or consensual (Rancière) state. People living in liberal democratic societies today, their argument goes, do not experience democracy, because the political environment into which they are thrown is not meant to provide them with this experience. 'Inverted totalitarianism', in Wolin's phrase, the order of police in Rancière's terms, confine democracy to procedures and practices in which only highly specialised officials take part. Ordinary people play the role of "citizens-on-call". The powerful dynamics of late modern capitalism contribute significantly to this development, and whereas Wolin is perhaps more explicit in stressing this, Rancière also connects capitalist economics to the "de-democratisation" of democracy.

To be sure, these two thinkers do not propose exactly the same democratic vision. Wolin aspires to what he calls a 'fugitive democracy' in order to sustain his vision for a politics of democratic commonality. Rancière places greater emphasis on the element of disagreement, advocating a democracy of dissensus. However, both appreciate the power contained within the spatial and temporal dimension of democracy and identify it as the most promising alternative to our current condition. It is in this context that they both attend to the possibilities that ordinary people have to become political actors and to act democratically against a system that wants them to be no more than apathetic consumers. Neither Wolin nor Rancière envision mass revolutionary movements that would disrupt the late modern capitalist state, but, as Wendy Brown puts it, not because "big powers cannot be fought, but rather [because] those powers, big and bad as they are, do not completely fill the space of political possibility".¹ Democracy in current conditions is most effectively to be conceived and experienced as a rupture of the system. The democratic practices both Wolin and Rancière consider essential are based on local and temporal experiences of people who experience a grievance, a wrong: disturbances, eruptions and injuries caused on the body of the corporate/consensual state by spontaneous yet

¹ Wendy Brown, "Democracy and bad dreams" *Theory and Event* 10, no. 1 (2007), §16.

systematic practices performed and experienced by ordinary individuals. Reinvigoration of democracy, if it is to come, will originate from the ordinary.

The chapter begins by outlining the democratic vision of Sheldon Wolin, because it is supported by the assumption that democracy needs to be sustained by an ethos, an assumption that Rancière, his encounter, seeks to refute. We will see that in articulating his vision for a politics of democratic commonality Wolin attends to the importance that an ethos can play within it. He does so essentially by proposing two different ethea, one public and one private, which can substitute for the ethea of competitiveness/corruption and apathy which he finds prevailing in the managerial state and its late-modern citizenry. Here, we will follow Wolin's latest work especially thoroughly because it casts light on aspects of his earlier elaborations of the vision of fugitive democracy, correcting and complementing them.

The next section critically examines Rancière whose approach not only rejects the idea that a public ethos of any kind is needed to sustain dissensus democracy but also leaves the possible role of any individual ethic for democracy undiscussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion that brings these two visions together and suggests that they can inform each other in a way that enables us to engage in a constructive discussion of the ethos adequate to democracy in its specific temporal and spatial dimension. It is argued that while Rancière correctly affirms the prevalence of a strong public ethos as a drive to assimilation and suppression of individualism, Wolin with his discussion of a "democratisation of the self", albeit under-formulated, is better able to appreciate otherness and the possibilities for common action in the time that everything can be pluralised. In this way, the present chapter contributes to the argument of the thesis in a double way: first by introducing the relevance of the temporal aspect to democracy and second by suggesting the importance of the ordinary subject to its realisation. Most important for the thesis, this chapter deepens our discussion of the fluidity and ambiguity of ethos, supporting the idea that a discussion of a democratic ethos must honour the interplay between its two components, the private and the public, without emphasizing the one over the other.

I. Wolin: Fugitive Democracy versus Managed Democracy

Sheldon S. Wolin is not only one of the most prominent political thinkers - his *Politics and Vision* (1960) is probably among the best books of and on political thought - but also a radical democratic thinker who has conceived an inspiring alternative redefinition of the political and of what late modern democratic politics can be. By theorising the political as that which is public, common to the ordinary people, Wolin provides us with a vision of what the role of democracy in late modernity must be, according to the peculiarities and demands of this specific era. Rather than following one of the major democratic traditions, Wolin as a genuine *theoros* of political reality, one who does not rely merely on observation but on imagination as well, pursues a critical form of inquiry and provides a vision which can reinvigorate democratic politics. More than a mere normative or descriptive thinker, then, Wolin is above all a creative thinker.

This section discusses Wolin's critique of the late modern political system in the United States and his vision for the substitution of a fugitive democratic politics of commonality for the prevailing managed democracy. The reading pursued here places at the centre of Wolin's inquiry his claim that ethos is indispensable to political life for, as he admits, for a long time "most political theorising assumed that for political life to exist it had to inhabit a structure of governance, a 'form'" and that "the idea of a form also signified a particular way of being in the world...".² The discussion, then, maintains that Wolin's formulation of a response against managed democracy is based on an ethos he finds most appropriate for a radical democracy; that is, a democracy responsive to the grievances and inequalities of a political society seized by economy; a democracy local and fugitive yet effective.

As I read it, Wolin's radical democratic vision has three pillars: recasting democracy not as a form but as an experience; envisaging the demos not as apathetic mass but as a plurality of democratic citizenries; and attending to ethos not as *the* public political culture but as a sensibility of commonality. I contend that Wolin not only gives an inspiring account of the role that citizens can have in the reinvigoration of democracy; he does so while, unlike Mouffe,

² Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 557.

avoiding the trap of suggesting a strict account of demos, by conceptualising it as a multiplicity. Moreover, in my analysis I follow how the conceptualisation of ethos changes in Wolin's thought, a shift that contributes to my argument for the fluctuating nature of ethos, namely regarding its openness to multiple formulations and interpretations. I argue that, whereas Wolin is attentive to the two components of ethos, that is the public and the private, he leaves untreated the idea of the "democratisation of the self", while at the same time over-emphasising the importance of "the culture of everyday reality".

Managed Democracy and the Corporate Ethos

Wolin's critical engagement with the condition of democracy in the United States is central to his most recent book *Democracy Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (2008). However, elements of this critique were developed in earlier articles as well as in the expanded version of his *Politics and Vision* in 2004. As early as 1981 Wolin, from his position as editor of the journal *democracy: A Journal of Political Renewal and Radical Change*³ described the condition that twenty- five years later he would see as catastrophic for American democracy and that would prompt him to articulate in more concrete terms his vision of a 'fugitive democracy':

The democratic prospect may seem bleak, but despair is a luxury that democrats cannot afford. Since the present political system is likely to remain an enemy of freedom, equality, and participation, and since its repressive powers are formidable, democratic resistance should be expressed in constructive actions aimed at creating alternative modes of common life. Most individuals possess the basic resources needed to found new, more democratic relationships: some skills, energy, and the moral sense to participate in the exercise of power. Contrary to the cheerless advice of disillusioned radicals of the '60s that the right course was to prepare for 'the long march through institutions', today's democrats must begin to disengage from the many forms of dependency that make them accomplices in the legitimation of reactionary power.⁴

³ The title of the journal is in all lower-case letters and thus *democracy* instead of *Democracy*.

⁴ Sheldon S. Wolin, "Editorial" *democracy* 1, no. 2 (1981), 6.

This provocative passage aptly summarises Wolin's attitude towards what he presents as the major political challenge for democracy today. His efforts in his latest work are concentrated on providing a concrete yet radical response to this challenge, without recourse to lament or easy disappointment. I find that at the heart of the problem he places the substitution of what he calls 'corporate ethos' for an ethos of concern for what is common.

The political system that has captured the life and imagination of the citizens in the post-September 11 United States of America is, Wolin claims, to be accused of "the comatose condition of democracy".⁵ It is this condition that he examines, aiming not only to provide an exegesis of how it is nurtured but also to develop a response in the form of a democratic theory. The task is monumental, for Wolin needs to expose the shallowness of the system's hypocritical claim to democracy and in order to do so he needs to point to actual events from the American political and economic life. Thus, he believes that the democratic theory that can undertake this endeavour needs to be substantive, descriptive and critical, and that it "should recognise that in the contemporary world democracy is not hegemonic but beleaguered and permanently in opposition to structures it cannot command".⁶ It is a theory that affirms the disadvantaged position of its subject matter, but still finds reasons to fervently and creatively support its case.

In bridging the normative with the descriptive, Wolin both analyses the contemporary political condition and scrutinises the essence of democratic citizenship. *Democracy Inc.* is a detailed analysis of the sombre present of the American political system, a melancholic glance to the condition that the "oldest democracy in the world" has fallen into during the last 10 years. At the same time it is also a tribute to the power of the local, the ordinary, the demos. Therefore, while the book is a comment on the assumption advocated by the Bush administration that the United States of America is "the greatest power in the world", it is also an investigation into the reinvigoration of democratic citizenship, that is "the highest and most difficult office". At stake is the question of the legitimation of the constitution of a

⁵ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 590.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 601.

democracy as “greatest power” and also “a reordering of basic power arrangements and a different understanding of civic commitments from that of spectator”.⁷ In his reliance on the ability of the demos, in its plural and divergent expressions, and despite its current voicelessness, Wolin places ethos at the centre of his democratic vision. However, as I suggest at the end of the section, he does so in a way that leaves many issues undiscussed.

Wolin develops his analyses by way of contributing to the Aristotelian taxonomy of regimes and enriching it with the one which he finds most appropriate to postmodern conditions. He names this regime “Superpower”, a term he coins to describe the American political system as an expansive system of power that is characterised by limitlessness: it only accepts as its limits the ones it poses on itself. Wolin invents a new term to describe Superpower’s projection of power: ‘inverted totalitarianism’ ; he does so not to claim that the American political system is a totalitarian regime, but instead to identify its tendency towards totalising power and expose the strong interconnections between the political and the corporate.

Wolin characterises a series of developments as contributions to the emergence of Superpower and to its transmutation into an Empire. The development that caused the starkest and most catalytic transformations, though, was, according to Wolin, the emergence of economic powers such as the globalising corporation, a shift that signaled the upgrading of political economy. Previously the discourse only of the advocates of the limited role for the state, political economy is now elevated to the public philosophy of Superpower that champions the integration of corporation, state and economics, seeking to expand in previously unthought degrees and intensities the field of economy.⁸ It is the rhetorical tool of those powers that, in the name of globalisation and intensification of technological progress, proclaim the inevitable primacy of economy, turning politics to a field of secondary interest. As Wolin observes, Marx’s prediction of the fall of capitalism proved false but not his claim that future societies would inherit a

⁷ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2008), 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 564.

highly developed economy.⁹ Superpower is the place where capitalism meets with liberal democracy.

Wolin's main concern is with the transformation of the political into the managerial, a change that has also affected the quality of the ethos shared by the members of the society. It is not that politics vanishes completely from the scene. Rather in Superpower the political and the corporate are melded together, signifying the emergence of a new political form-and the decline of an older one.¹⁰ Corporate capital, enhanced and maintained by modern science and technology, is the main power that expresses the political authority of the state in Superpower. Globalising corporations are now elevated to the status of the main political actors, as the movement of CEOs and (usually male) executives to governmental departments to undertake political posts is intensified: the political is managerialised. As Wolin puts it, "[w]here modern power shipped huge finished products, postmodern power transmits messages".¹¹ The new American political elite is at the same time an economic elite, its only concern to expand the economic impact of Superpower, while using the latest communication technology and tools to disseminate its messages with a political shade.

Wolin seeks to critically examine not only the paradoxical assumption that such a system is proclaimed to be the best example of successful democracy but even that it is compatible in any substantive sense with democracy. His argument, then, is that Superpower's structure and function is incompatible with democracy, for it sees in the latter a potential threat to social stability: contingencies have no place in a political system that wants to present itself as reliable and effective.¹² The only democracy suited to this system is a minimal democracy confined to and by procedural guarantees: equal rights to vote and speak, free elections and accountable officials, regularised legislative, judicial and administrative processes. These highly rationalised practices are produced, managed and controlled by experts, consultants and executives. Hence Wolin calls this minimal democracy a "managed

⁹ Ibid, 565.

¹⁰ Ibid., 551.

¹¹ Ibid., 563.

¹² Ibid., 564.

democracy”, that is one that is exhausted in the form of election politics: managed democracy is democracy systematised.¹³ Only a democracy thus defined can be suitable to the aims, dynamics and functions of a Superpower that claims global hegemony, for it mediates between this claim and the democratic ideal of self-government.¹⁴ Managed democracy is democracy without politics.

Most important for the present thesis, however, is the fact that Wolin also finds that this new political system has brought about a decline of a public ethic. This is the outcome not only of the way which a media culture supporting and nurturing capitalism and managerial democracy promotes mass fantasies at odds with the civic culture required by democracy.¹⁵ It is also a symptom of the way in which managerial democracy discredits ideals of civil service and disinterestedness by regarding them as something other than public virtues and unnecessary for a healthy political life.¹⁶ In the hearts and minds of those engaged in public administration and politics, the corporate ethos now takes the place of public virtues: a distinct culture that “might be defined as the norms and practices operative at various levels of the corporate hierarchy that shape or influence the beliefs and behaviour of those who work in a particular institutional context”.¹⁷ This ethos not only is anti-political, fomenting competition rather than cooperation and profitability rather than commonality but also, and more specifically, antidemocratic, thriving among an ‘expert’ elite which excludes the citizenry from any deliberative role, forcing it to choose apathy as its political stance, coloured with a xenophobic patriotism. The corporate ethos reigns in high-level government offices wiping out the democratic political ethos.

A direct political implication of the prevalence of the corporate ethos is the politically demobilised society, the absolute political anaesthetisation of the citizenry. The corporate branch of Superpower demands that at the centre of its life is the consumer, not the citizen as in a genuine democracy. Its powers

¹³ Wolin, *Democracy Inc*, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 527.

¹⁶ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 135.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

found the solution to the problem in presenting both cultures, that of the consumer and that of the citizen, as having a common element: as centered upon free choice.¹⁸ Outside of elections there is only a “virtual citizenry”, invited to have opinions which are translated into “measurable responses to questions predesigned to elicit them”.¹⁹ The citizen of managed democracy is a consumer of everything, even of democracy as it is served to him by the corporate state.

For Wolin, what this shift in the status of the citizenry signifies, is “symptomatic of a systemic change, from democracy as a method of ‘popularising’ power to democracy as a brand name for a product manageable at home and marketably abroad”.²⁰ What he finds more devastating about this shift is that democracy itself is distanced from the experience of ordinary citizens, who normally give it its heartbeat. Managed democracy is a democracy without a demos and therefore barely a democracy.

Wolin’s Radical Democratic Vision: Experience and Demos

Wolin’s work on democracy in the United States of America in late modernity is a lament for a lost commonality, for a democracy “reduced to a rearguard action, struggling not to advance and improve the lives of the Many but merely to defend the shredded remains of earlier achievements”.²¹ It is in this setting that ethos becomes central in Wolin’s discussion of democracy and so the crucial question of his inquiries is formed as such: “Is democracy possible when the dominant ethos in the economy fosters anti-political and antidemocratic behaviour and values?”.²² Or more specifically, when “with the amalgamation of corporation and state the political ethos of public service is

¹⁸ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 576-7.

¹⁹ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

²² *Ibid.*, 139.

replaced by an aggressive and exploitative ethos?”.²³ Wolin does not come up with a master-plan for how managed democracy can be overturned by a major revolution but he has suggestions about how it can be broken and perforated so that it can be enervated. These suggestions contribute to a distinct and radical democratic vision with three branches: the reconceptualisation of democracy not as a form but as an everyday experience, of the demos not as an apathetic mass but as a plurality consisting of democratic citizenries (in plural) and of ethos not as *the* public culture of a tightly defined unity but as the sensibility of commonality that unites different individuals that share a specific experience of injustice. I will now develop each of these branches.

Wolin’s alternative to managed democracy is inspired by ‘fugitive democracy’, a vision that he elaborated in his earlier work as an antidote to what he then perceived as one of the greatest threats against democracy - the limits posed by its indissoluble connection to a constitution. Here Wolin discriminates between, on the one hand, the *political*, as “an expression of the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well-being of the collectivity” and on the other hand politics, defined as “the legitimised and public contestation, primarily by organised and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collectivity”. That said, politics is continuous, ceaseless, and endless, whereas the political is episodic, rare.²⁴ Democracy is one possible expression of the political and its distinctiveness lies in the fact that it is affirmed as “a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens” and hence “with their possibilities for becoming political beings through the self-discovery of common concerns and of modes of action for realising them”.²⁵ Rather than one form or regime of administration, democracy is “a moment of commonality” against a background of difference and divergence.

²³ Ibid, 143.

²⁴ Sheldon S. Wolin, “Fugitive democracy” *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (1994), 11.

²⁵ Ibid., 11.

Affirming democracy in its fugitive dimension leads Wolin to refute the seeming naturalness of the argument that democracy needs necessarily to be coupled with a constitution. As he sees it, this modern settlement of constitutional democracy in fact entails its restriction within certain limits and thus its domestication, its taming so that it is compatible with the dominant power groups in a society. As he puts it, “constitutional democracy is democracy fitted to a constitution”.²⁶ Hence Wolin’s reluctance to accept democracy as a form of government, as administration and therefore as a predictable settled set of practices such as elections, a controllable and manageable activity; for this would be a democracy without the demos. At stake instead are the “moments of commonality” that ordinary citizens enjoy. However, as will be discussed, the commonalities which are at the core of the Wolinesque vision of democracy are not necessarily fixed and predetermined. They can also emerge through the necessities and circumstances that ordinary people encounter in their everyday lives.

As Wolin clarifies, democracy thus understood can only be an “ephemeral” democracy. This is so because, as Aristotle emphasises, democracy is the creation of those who must work and have no time for leisure or money to hire representatives for their interests. The case is, says Wolin, that political theorists from antiquity to modernity have made a category mistake by treating democracy as a possible constitutional form for an entire society.²⁷ Democracy has never been about governing a political society: its essence lies in the participation of the “leisureless” in political affairs, that is affairs that are in common. Ordinary people and not professional politicians are the subjects of democracy. Hence its plasticity, its ability to take many forms, according to the circumstances and their demands: democracy is and can only be a response to the call made on such ordinary people by a specific occasion. There is a temporal and spatial limitation to democracy, but this is its strength rather than its impotence.

What is at stake with democracy, we learn from Wolin, is not where it is located. It can take place at any site and be confined to none. Rather, the issue with democracy is how it is experienced. Wolin’s perception of this

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 602.

experience is radical: it all depends on a sparkle that is created the very moment that those excluded experience the unfair treatment, the injustice made against them and this felt grievance is brought into the scene as a collective claim. He finds that this is most likely to happen “in local, small-scale settings, where both the negative consequences of political powerlessness and the positive possibilities of political involvement seem more evident”.²⁸ Democracy, affirmed as fugitive, experiential, has a local character and this is where the power of its regenerating dynamic lies. It is about equality, “equality of power and equality of sharing in the benefits and values made possible by social cooperation”;²⁹ when this balance of sharing is not followed by some members of the political society, then democracy breaks out as the restorative move that will remedy the injustice. It is for this reason that it can only be conceived as “a mode of being which is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily”.³⁰ But Wolin by no means sees democracy as able to flourish while restricted within the narrow boundaries of localism. For this would be a confined democracy and thus barely a democracy. Instead, he recognises that under circumstances “the effectiveness of demotic action can go beyond the local when it can empathise”.³¹ As I will discuss, there is an ethical dimension that pervades democracy and that can mobilise ordinary people to spontaneously respond to calls for action.

The main actor of democracy thus understood, its *demos*, is not a socially, culturally or economically uniform unity. Wolin does not endorse the idea of a pre-established political actor who is called on duty on specific occasions, for example elections, and then enjoys an unbothered life in a capitalist-liberal society. His *demos* is drawn to democracy spontaneously and sporadically. That is, the *demos* acts from outside and against the established political rules and practices. Historically, Wolin says, the enlargement of the circle of political participants and therefore the formation of an active *demos* has always been the result of revolutionary action, of the wholesale transgression

²⁸ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 291.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰ Wolin, “Fugitive democracy”, 23.

³¹ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 289.

of inherited forms.³² It is through transgressive practices that demos acquires access to political experience and makes itself political: "It is by *stasis* not *physis* that the demos acquires a civic nature".³³ Demos is not a label attributed *a priori* to the members of a political society: it is a title attributed to it at the very moment of its performance of political actions. Since the political stands for valued commonalities to be shared and promoted, the emergence for a limited time of demotic action entails the recognition of this commonality among individuals otherwise different; this commonality, however, is by no means stable: it is fugitive and impermanent.³⁴ Differences that exist among individuals do not function as barriers to the formation of a commonality: by contrast, they have to be taken into account and, ideally, incorporated into the decision to do so.³⁵ As Wolin comments elsewhere, this "requires that the experiences of justice and injustice serve as moments for the demos to think, to reflect, per chance to construct themselves as actors. Democracy is about the continuing self-fashioning of the demos."³⁶ It is about the participation in a demotic practice of those who are otherwise excluded from a self-claimed democratic political system.

However, upon the end of such transgressions, upon completion of the demotic moment, democracy settles down and politics begins to take place in the form of processes of institutionalisation and thus attenuation: elections of governmental and other officials, procedures of decision-making and re-organisation of higher offices. These all come after democracy, they do not constitute its essence: democracy cannot be otherwise but occasional, fugitive. It is along these lines that Wolin suggests that there is hope for the murky portrait of the late modern political landscape he draws in his latest work, where the interest has now shifted from constitutional to managerial democracy, putting the weight of the task on the shoulders of the people who participate in the moment of transgression, not what follows it. These people, the demos or, better, the plurality of democratic citizenries, can reinvigorate

³² Wolin, "Fugitive democracy", 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁴ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 472.

³⁵ Wolin, "What revolutionary action means today", 245.

³⁶ Wolin, "The liberal/democratic divide", 98.

democracy. But they do not form the citizenry as an abstract idea. Wolin resists the inclusiveness of holistic notions such as “We, the people” or “nation” for they imply a majority that is excluded from politics.³⁷ The demos as revitaliser of democracy consists of “the citizens as carriers of everyday cultural traditions”³⁸ and hence as bearers of differences who can nonetheless discover points of commonality, common concern and advantage. The rationality that keeps the demos together is a fugitive one.

Does Wolin, then, envision a revolution when he suggests that democracy is a rebellious political moment? His answer is positive, but he claims that democrats need a new conception of revolution: they need “to reinvent the forms and practices that will express a democratic conception of collective life”.³⁹ A democratic revolution is one that does not have recourse to violence, but to creativity, for it is the moment that the demos reflects and decides to form or reform itself in order to respond to a grievance. To be sure, the actor expected to undertake this endeavour of bringing the dissonance to light is the ordinary citizen, whereas the places it is expected to arise are the ordinary places of everyday life: school councils, neighbourhoods, working places. For Wolin is reluctant towards the extraordinary as a source for democratic possibilities: he sees in the marginalisation of the normal and the exaltation of the extraordinary the conditions of a critical totalitarianism. Whereas the normal is “the product of cultivated relationships”, critical totalitarianism seeks to belittle these very relations: it is the normal that “sustains the skilled activities that assure the everyday operation of society”.⁴⁰ Wolin’s democratic vision is wrapped around the ordinary: “If it is anything, democracy is about [...] ordinary human beings venturing ‘out’ to take part in deliberations over shared concerns, to contest exclusions from the material and ideal advantages of a free society, and to invent new forms and practices”.⁴¹ It is the ordinary struggles, those that have to be given in

³⁷ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 278.

³⁸ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 605.

³⁹ Wolin, “What revolutionary action means today?”, 249.

⁴⁰ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 467.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 467

the most usual and routine places of everyday life, that can perforate the complex of managerial democracy and corporate economy.

I find that Wolin's reliance on the demos for the task of reinvigorating democracy is more fruitful, sanguine and compatible with late modernity in comparison to Mouffe's. Whereas she insists on the importance of the embrace by the citizens of the two principles of liberal democracy in all cases, Wolin is more attentive to the spontaneous and fugitive occurrences that may bring otherwise diverse individuals together. It is for his conceptualisation of demos in its already plural dimension as citizenries that I consider his approach closer to a pluralism pertinent to late modernity.

Wolin's Radical Democratic Vision: Ethos

I have discussed how "fugitive democracy", and the irruptive politics that Wolin envisions, the demotic moments he aspires to for redemocratisation, can only be the product of "a fragmented demos, frustrated by the political system" acting spontaneously, yet regularly, to respond to the injustices made against it.⁴² The affirmation of democracy in its fugitive dimension guides, I think, Wolin towards the acknowledgment of the double nature of democratisation: if democracy is to be saved from the corporate forces that have rendered it a mere set of procedures, and so if reinvigoration is to be achieved, then an ethos has a strong role in this process. Most interestingly it is ethos in its two components, the public and the private, that proves crucial for the endeavour.

Wolin recognises the indispensability of ethos to democracy as he envisions it: "if democracy is about [participation], its first requirement is a supportive culture, a complex of beliefs, values, and practices that nurture equality, cooperation and freedom".⁴³ The individuals bearing the weight of undertaking the task of reinvigorating democracy will be driven to action

⁴² Wolin, *Democracy Inc*, 277. To Wolin's presumption that fugitive democratic practices should be practiced regularly, as he stresses in his latest work, cf. his older presumption that originally democracy's dynamic appears "excessive, irregular and spasmodic", Sheldon S. Wolin, "Norm and form: The constitutionalising of democracy", in Peter J. Euben, , John R. Wallach, , and Josiah Ober (eds.), *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 48.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 260-1.

prompted by a variety of ethical dispositions, for example resentment, frustration or empathy. Despite not naming the ethos appropriate to such a vision, Wolin nevertheless distinguishes between it and the prevailing corporate one: it is “the difference between a commonality and an economic polity, between managing a society and its ecology in terms of the common good and subordinating the political system to economic criteria”.⁴⁴ It is this ethos that draws citizens to the politics of democratic commonality and thus to the undertaking of common endeavours for “the care and fate of the polity”. It is for this reason that Wolin places his faith for redemocratisation in the people, on the change they can bring on themselves, “sloughing off their political passivity and, instead, acquiring some of the characteristics of a demos”. As he says, this entails “creating themselves, coming-into-being by virtue of their actions”, for

the democratisation of politics remains merely formal without the democratisation of the self. Democratisation is not about being ‘left alone’, but about becoming a self that sees the values of common involvements and endeavours and finds in them a source of self-fulfillment [...] To become a democrat is to change one’s self, to learn how to act collectively, as a demos.⁴⁵

That said, democratisation is neither an extraordinary revolutionary event nor an administration process carried out by highly specialised experts or professional politicians, even though in certain cases it may depend on them as well; rather, it is a shift of a body that “goes public” as part of its everyday reality.⁴⁶ To be sure, such a displacement requires practice, transformation so that one learns how to act collectively; democracy *also* takes place on the level of the individual. In fact, this is where it begins.

At the same time, Wolin contends that a democracy requires that the demos embraces and bears a distinct popular culture - in the original sense of the word *cultus*, meaning tilling, cultivating, tending, a culture that prompts it to engage in cooperation regarding common arrangements, practices in which, potentially, all could share in deciding the uses of power while bearing

⁴⁴ Ibid., 287.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 289.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 289.

responsibility for their consequences.”⁴⁷ The ideals of public service and disinterestedness are embraced by the servants of the state because they are supposed to promote the general welfare, not the interests of a private corporation and they are valued for their contribution to political life. It is this public ethic that Wolin values as appropriate for democracy and that he sees fading in inverted totalitarianism, whereas in its place we witness the reconstitution of a civic culture, one where the citizen is shrunk to the voter, “hammered into resignation” and “crashed” by the corporate power.⁴⁸ However, unlike Hegel, Wolin does not trust the future of the polity only in the hands of the state’s servants; he also aspires to another dimension of the public ethos, one played out right on the level of the demos.

The concluding phrase of the latest version of *Politics and Vision* characteristically depicts Wolin’s stance towards the idea of a public ethos: “In the era of Fascism Gramsci had conceived the task to be one of arousing ‘the civic consciousness of the nation’. In the era of Superpower the task is to nurture the civic conscience of society.”⁴⁹ The image of the collective Wolinesque democratic ethos, though, shifts over time. To be sure, in his earlier discussion of the work of Rawls, Wolin expresses his disdain for the conviction that there should be a political culture informing the life of contemporary political communities: “The idea that there could be ‘a’ political culture at the historical moment when all modern political societies are wrestling with the facts of multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, and porous borders seems quixotic, but it also has a dangerous aspect that lies in a solidary conception of the political”.⁵⁰ Wolin, contra Rawls, declared himself unwilling to be captivated by “evasive monochromes”, like the idea of a citizenry sharing *the* political culture.⁵¹ However, as is evident from the previous discussion Wolin now expresses his discomfort with regard to the discredit of values that would constitute a democratic civic ethic. As he advocates, “democracy’s idea is based on a culture that encourages

⁴⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁸ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 566; 578.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 606.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 550.

⁵¹ Wolin, “The liberal/democratic divide”, 118.

members to join in common endeavours, not as a flagellating form of self-denial but as the means of taking care of a specific and concrete part of the world and of its life-forms".⁵² That is, Wolin withdraws from his earlier thesis that a collective ethos is restricting for democracy and instead sees in it the sources of a response to the current deadlock of democracy.

However, despite the central role he attributes to commonality and the importance of such an ethos shared among the constituents of the demos, Wolin still rejects the idea of a too tight and concrete perception of the fixity of a democratic citizenry. His hesitation springs from his endorsement of the idea of the intrinsic plurality of the demos, of its potentialities for continuous reconstitution and reformation, that is his faith in the possibility of renewal. The latter, as he says, "draws on the simple fact that ordinary individuals are capable of creating new cultural patterns of commonality at any moment [...] Without necessarily intending it, they are renewing the political by contesting the forms of unequal power which democratic liberty and equality have made possible and which democracy can eliminate only by betraying its own values".⁵³ Restoration of equality where it is lost passes through the creative forces carried by ordinary people.

I believe that the shift in Wolin's democratic thought from an absolutely fugitive democracy towards a democratic politics of commonality is indicated by the change in his perception of ethos in its dimension of collectivity. The latter is affirmed by Wolin as temporary and fugitive: it is only difference that is stable.⁵⁴ Commonality is forged the moment that people, despite their differences, affirm an experience of grievance as shared; the common, rather than being prefixed and predetermined, is open and diverse. That said, the democratic vision Wolin espouses oscillates between the idea of the common as indispensable to democratic life and the dynamic of renewal that is brought in this life by the renewal of demands and claimers. In William Connolly's terminology, it is a vision that affirms the constitutive tension

⁵² Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 288.

⁵³ Wolin, "Fugitive democracy", 24.

⁵⁴ Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy, difference and recognition" *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993), 472.

between established commonality and the politics of becoming.⁵⁵ For Wolin, the corporate ethos of competitiveness and the individual ethos of apathy that overwhelmingly seize political life today can only be disturbed by another ethos - one that is played out in both the private and the public domains but which does not entail acceptance of a fixed democratic subject.

Criticisms and Limitations

The local character of the politics of democratic commonality that Wolin counter-poses to the antidemocratic forces of the late modern corporate state has been criticised by many theorists of democracy. According to Wolin's formulations, democracy is primarily expected to emerge and be experienced not on the large scale of the nation-state but in small scale settings on a regular basis. Despite its virtue in emphasising the specific moment that the democratic erupts, some consider this a too limited and confined version of democracy. Wolin, the argument goes, is drawn to the exaggeration of the virtue of local democratic practices by his deep disappointment with the condition that American political life has fallen into and this does not allow him to appreciate all the possibilities available to democracy today. Connolly, for example, worries that Wolin's localism entails a desire to slow down political time so that democracy can flourish. Such a view, Connolly thinks, is insufficient in the contemporary period.⁵⁶ He is also concerned with what he calls Wolin's effort to highlight a vital element in the democratic experience, which leads him to an over-purification of this experience and thus to a possible disenchantment with the contemporary complexity that informs it and makes it possible.⁵⁷ What is at stake in Connolly's critique is Wolin's failure to appreciate this complexity and therefore the complex forms that democracy itself can take in the era of acceleration of pace.

According to another line of argument, Wolin falls for an unremitting critique of American democracy and capitalism and this limits his democratic

⁵⁵ William E. Connolly, "Politics and Vision", in A. Bowinick and W. Connolly, *Democracy and Vision*, 12.

⁵⁶ Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 142.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

vision. Michael Shapiro, for example, holds that Wolin not only does not seem to appreciate the current economic and cultural temporalities in any way, but also sees them merely as destructive.⁵⁸ He thus misses the possibilities for disruption of these temporalities through democratic potentials. In a similar vein, Melissa Orlie criticises Wolin's judgement that the culture of consumption that prevails today necessarily leads to depoliticisation. She calls for a recognition of the possible positive effects it can have in the battle against capitalism. More specifically, Orlie's Foucauldian critique suggests that the accumulation of individual practices of commodity consumption can function as a power of enactment for new forms and practices of resistance.⁵⁹ For others, the problem with fugitive democracy is to be located in its ambiguous nature. Mark Warren, for example, worries about the disconnection of the concept of democracy from governing and consequently that Wolin underestimates the importance of stabilities and securities for the function of democracy,⁶⁰ whereas George Kateb questions the necessarily democratic character of fugitive democracy and expresses worries that although it can be demotic, even profoundly anti-elitist, this in no way secures its democratic character. He also sees in Wolin what he calls an "ontological disgrace of inequality" and an inability to otherwise justify why the injustice produced by it can be a cause for rage.⁶¹

The coherence of some of these arguments notwithstanding, Wolin's contribution to democracy and democratic theory is tremendous. Orlie is right to see in the consumption habits and practices of ordinary people a fissure for democratic action; the late modern individual has the power, when functioning collectively with others, to put pressure on the powers of capitalism and affect its trajectory. However, I believe that this can very clearly fall into the category of the fugitive practices that Wolin envisions. Warren is also correct to observe that democracy needs stability and a

⁵⁸ Michael J. Shapiro, "Time, disjuncture, and democratic citizenship", in A. Bowinick and W. Connolly, *Democracy and Vision*, 232-255.

⁵⁹ Melissa A. Orlie, "Political capitalism and the consumption of democracy", in A. Bowinick and W. Connolly, *Democracy and Vision*, 138-160.

⁶⁰ Mark E. Warren, "Review: Politics and vision: Continuity and innovation in western political thought" *Political Theory* 34, no. 5 (2006), 667-673.

⁶¹ George Kateb, "Wolin as a critic of democracy", in A. Bowinick and W. Connolly, *Democracy and Vision*, 39-57.

certain degree of security to flourish. But on the other hand, I believe that Wolin is right to remark that the inverted totalitarianism/capitalism complex struggles to create a climate of fear so that citizens yearn for stability rather than civic engagement, for protection rather than political involvement.⁶² The quest for stability is a demand of totalitarianism, not of democracy. In any case, Wolin's formulation of democratic politics inspired by the experience of fugitive democracy as provided in his latest work shows the possibility for a reaction and response against the grievances that capitalism has brought into late modern societies. In his critique of the American economic-political complex one can read an indictment of the forces of capitalism that applies to countries in the European continent, as well. His trust in the power of the people and the importance of a "democratisation of the self" is attractive not only on the normative but also on the practical level. His vision that if there is any way to disturb capitalism, to respond to the exigencies it creates for ordinary people's lives, on the level of economy, ecology, social relations and political engagement, then this lies in the possibilities for practices that emerge on local levels, is an inspirational proposal articulated by a truly innovative political thinker.

However, what Wolin does not treat in depth is the issue of the ethos he aspires to, both on the collective and the individual level. He does not analyse sufficiently the dimensions of the "democratisation of the self" he suggests as a prerequisite for the reinvigoration of late-modern democracy. If, as he suggests, the development of ethos takes practice, transformation and learning to act collectively as part of one's everyday life, then he needs, I think, to show how these can be achieved. Nietzsche, Foucault and eventually Connolly would provide some excellent sources for drawing a clearer picture of the steps necessary to ensure that the individual can herself provide a fertile ground for democratisation. Moreover, I find that Wolin aspires to a collective democratic ethos in highly ambiguous terms and, although attentive to the interplay between these two components of ethos, he relies too much on what he calls "the culture of everyday reality to which political democracy should be attuned" without giving this sufficient

⁶² Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 239.

elaboration.⁶³ As a result, he seems to attribute a specific content to a political culture against another, and to ask for an harmonisation with it.

The chapter now turns to the work of one of the most important Continental thinkers and radical voices in, among other disciplines, political thought: Jacques Rancière. It does so because this particular thinker shares many ideas with Sheldon Wolin, but articulates them in a completely different way and places them in a different context. Without intending either to exaggerate these similarities or downplay their divergences, the following section critically engages with Rancière's democratic vision which places the importance for democracy in its temporal nature and can be therefore read as complementary to Wolin's work.

II. Rancière: Politics as Aesthetics

The *oeuvre* of Jacques Rancière cannot be classified and contained within a specific discipline. This is so not merely because his thinking cuts across disciplines as various as politics, aesthetics, philosophy, pedagogy, cinema and literature, but mainly because for Rancière a discipline is a fiction and lacks a real field.⁶⁴ As he puts it, "I don't speak for members of a particular body or discipline. I write to shatter the boundaries that separate specialists – of philosophy, art, social sciences, etc."⁶⁵ This deep and conscious interdisciplinarity that characterises his work is profoundly evident in his effort to surpass the Benjaminian approach to aesthetics as connected to totalitarianism ("the aestheticisation of politics specific to the age of the masses") and to affirm politics as aesthetics. His multidimensional and interdisciplinary work on democracy has established him as a prominent political thinker although, paradoxically, he condemns the work of political philosophy.

⁶³ Ibid., 268.

⁶⁴ Jacques Rancière, "Art is going elsewhere. And politics has to catch it" *Krisis-Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*. 1 (2008), 72.

⁶⁵ Jacques Rancière, Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, "Art of the possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in conversation with Jacques Ranciere." *Artforum* (2007), 257.

Two particular theoretical concerns have evolved in Rancière's work. The first is to give an account of how social and political domination is connected with the logic of social and political emancipation; the second is to put into practice his belief that the role of the philosopher is not to give his/her voice to those whose voices are suppressed and thus cannot be heard, but instead to add it to theirs, which entails a process of listening rather than interpreting.⁶⁶ This section takes on the vision of democracy espoused by Rancière, that is, democracy as a process of subjectification and particularly as disidentification. Rancière develops this democratic vision in the context of his affirmation of democracy as the institution of politics itself, the latter being a question of aesthetics, a matter of appearances. The present discussion unfolds around Rancière's denunciation of the idea of ethos as incompatible with democracy. It is argued that it is Rancière's understanding of ethos only in its collective component — as the attunement of the individual way of life with that of a community — and his overlooking of individual ethical dispositions that leads him to, mistakenly, exclude ethos as such from his otherwise provocative vision. It is also argued that this exclusion renders his vision ethically vulnerable and politically questionable.

Rejecting Political Philosophy, Discrediting Ethos

The rejection of ethos from the thinking of democracy is dictated according to Rancière by the double paradox that characterises late-modern democracy. The bankruptcy of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe inaugurated the era of postdemocracy, that is of a consensus democracy, inherent in the dominant discourse of which is a paradox: while democracy is celebrated as the only legitimate political regime at the same time there is a noticeable disaffection with regard to its institutional mechanisms and forms. The paradox is enhanced even further by the profound response of the system itself: it is not only expected but imperative that attention is given to the appropriateness of political practices to a society's ways of being rather than

⁶⁶ Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's contribution to the ethics of recognition" *Political Theory* 31, no.1 (2003), 137.

to institutions.⁶⁷ Stated in a different way, democracy brings with it a certain democratic life, indeed one so intense and full of vitality, which is so excessive that it results in the ruination of democratic government itself.⁶⁸

Paradoxically, then, the success of democracy is accompanied by a reduction of democracy to a certain state of social relationships. This is far from unproblematic for Rancière, who in this coincidence between democracy's political form and its tangible being, as he describes it, sees a second paradox: the return of the subject of democracy, that is of the people. The paradox with this return lies in that the demos, considered too "overdetermined" to allow the unhindered function of modern democracy, was previously abandoned. However, the form in which this subject returns as identical to itself, as one body set up against others, brings with it the burden of political philosophy.⁶⁹ It is in this context that Rancière's argument against ethos is articulated.

In order to understand Rancière's argument against ethos, we need to follow the development of his political thinking and specifically his perception of political philosophy. To begin with, according to Rancière, political philosophy is characterised by a vicious circle between the political relationship and the political subject; that is, Rancière sees in political philosophy a prevailing assumption that there is a way of life specific to political existence and that politics is the achievement of a way of life proper to those destined to it. In short, politics is defined on the basis of a pre-existing subject that bears specific properties and possesses a specific character.⁷⁰ Against this presumption Rancière argues that what is specific to politics is exactly the lack of an absolutely and explicitly predefined subject. Thus, if we conceive of politics as a specific way of living, we abandon its specificity which, according to Rancière, lies in the existence of a relationship not between two subjects, but of the subject with itself in its double role, as *archon* (ruler) and *archomenos* (being ruled). It is the untying of this knot of

⁶⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 95-98.

⁶⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 7.

⁶⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 98.

⁷⁰ Jacques Rancière, "Ten theses on politics" *Theory and Event* 3, no. 1 (2001), §3.

subject and the relation to itself that eradicates politics.⁷¹ In Rancière's thought, politics requires a break with the very idea that there exist subjects that bear specific dispositions which render them proper to positions.

There is, then, a paradoxical logic that sustains Rancière's political reflection: politics (*la politique*) is not the subject matter of political philosophy, it is essentially opposed to it. The key to understanding this lies in the role that Rancière attributes to equality and the place he reserves for it in his perception of politics. Equality is the sole principle of politics: more specifically, politics "is that activity which turns equality as its principle".⁷² Equality is not the ultimate goal of politics, but its point of departure.⁷³ Equality is an axiom of politics, the supposition of political life and theory. Rancière's affirmation of equality stems from his affirmation of the egalitarian power of language, of what he calls literarity (*litterarite*, which sometimes is also translated as literariness), that is "the excess of words", the availability of words to anyone and everyone. It is on the basis of their literarity that humans are political animals:

Humans are political animals, then, for two reasons: first, because we have the power to put into circulation more words, "useless" and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation; secondly, because this fundamental ability to proliferate words is unceasingly contested by those who claim to "speak correctly"- that is, by the masters of designation and classification who, by virtue of wanting to retain their status and power, flat-out deny this capacity to speak.⁷⁴

But Rancière does not want us to mistake literarity for a mere given principle upon which human equality is founded; the argument does not stop here, for as he has put it,

⁷¹ Ibid., §4.

⁷² Rancière, *Disagreement*, ix.

⁷³ Solange Guénoun, James H. Kavanagh, Roxanne Lapidus, "Jacques Rancière: Literature, politics, aesthetics: Approaches to democratic disagreement" *SubStance* 29, no. 2 (2000), 3.

⁷⁴ Jacques Rancière and Davide Panagia, "Dissenting words: A conversation with Jacques Rancière" *Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (2000), 115.

The egalitarian axiom is not based on a common, natural attribute: the equality of speaking beings intervenes as an addition, as a break with the natural laws of the gravitation of social bodies. It is not about rights, but about potential egalitarian practices carried out by subjects.⁷⁵

Something more important is, then, at stake with literarity. It is not a bestowed, recognised right, but it is related with an ability to *perform* acts of equality through the disordering of bodies. It is its performative power that renders literarity so vital for political life.

The equality of anyone at all with anyone else thus defined is not, then, itself a political principle; it *becomes*, it proves itself to be political to the extent that it is verified and demonstrated, to the extent that it is enacted.⁷⁶ Equality thus defined is inscribed in political life and the distribution of bodies that the city needs in order to exist and function: to obey an order entails that one understands it, that one is equal to the commander. The trait of any social order is therefore the scandal of the absence of *arkhe*, of a starting point or basis of the community. It is sheer contingency: no divine law regulates human society.⁷⁷ Like Protagoras, Rancière sees political virtue as accessible to any and every individual in the form of a possibility that can potentially be enacted: for Protagoras this is achieved through education and social practice, for Rancière through a process of subjectification. This point of convergence is at the same time a major point of departure: unlike Protagoras, who sees a civic ethos lying in each and every citizen, Rancière is unable to grasp the private component of ethos. Rancière denies this attribute to his democratic subjects because, as I will soon discuss, he sees ethos as something that necessarily belongs to the city and hence only in its collective component. In the thesis I argue that attention to both the private and the public constituents of ethos is necessary when ethos is to be related to democracy.

Rancière conceives of political philosophy as nothing more than a set of reflective operations where philosophy tries to rid itself of politics, to suppress the scandal of sheer contingency and find a proper principle, a proper *arkhe*.

⁷⁵ Rancière, "Literature, politics, aesthetics", 6.

⁷⁶ Jacques Rancière, "Politics, identification, and subjectivization" *October* 61 (1992), 60.

⁷⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

In so doing, political philosophy presupposes that there is a rational mode of existence of political communities, one that distributes speaking beings to specific parts or places, according to their properties. The purpose of political philosophy, then, is to justify the order of the city as natural, to justify the appropriateness of some to rule over the others who are not qualified to do so. Its aim is to achieve politics by eliminating politics, that is by achieving philosophy in place of politics.⁷⁸ We have seen how Young is also sensitive to this distribution of speaking beings and how her vision for a radical communicative democracy aims at transcending the limits that the principle of “articulateness” sets on the determination of the political subject - only Rancière does not target merely deliberative models of democracy but political philosophy itself. And he has a more radical vision than Young’s to tackle it.

Politics, says Rancière, is an-archic, and this is a scandal that Plato and his successors feel the need to hide. What Plato struggles to do, says Rancière, is to expel from the body of the community the part of the community, that is the demos, that makes this scandal evident, for it is the part that brings to the city a qualification - freedom - that does not belong exclusively to them. Plato attributes the trait of anarchy to the specific regime that is connected to the reign of this part of society, democracy. As I have already discussed in Chapter One, it is by identifying the regime with the character, the idiosyncrasy of its citizens that Plato introduces the transformation of a form of politics into a mode of existence. Plato not only sees individual moral quality as connected with the political life of the city; we have seen that he also sees the exercise of politics as restricted to those who are of a higher moral quality. As Rancière observes, Plato is the founder of the anthropological conception of the political, the conception that identifies politics with the deployment of the properties of a type of man or a mode of life.⁷⁹ It is through this identification that Plato achieves the suppression and suspension of politics and its lack of any proper foundation.

In order to grasp what is at stake in the substitution of philosophy for politics, Rancière proposes the understanding of the latter from the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁹ Rancière, “Ten theses on politics”, §28.

perspective of the distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*) which he defines as “a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed”.⁸⁰ The word *partage* is ambivalent, since it means both that which separates and hence excludes and that which allows participation. By referring specifically to the partition of the sensible, Rancière wants to emphasise the link between that which exists in common and the distribution of those excluded from sensory experience. Politics here is understood as aesthetics, for it relies on the presupposition that there is a part that is not sensible, that is not visible or heard. It is an aesthetic activity because the very existence of a social arrangement presupposes that there are words, images, but also bodies in constant circulation and whose proper order is a perpetual source of disagreement.⁸¹ With this move he radicalises the idea that aesthetics refers to the domain of art only, extending it to the conceptual coordinates and modes of visibility operative across the political domain.⁸² Rancière recognises that next to politics there is another distribution of the sensible in political life: police, a key concept in his theory of democracy.

The term *police* (*la police*) is coined by Rancière in order to signify the particular mode of partition of the sensible that distributes bodies in a place or role according to their properties. It is not synonymous with repression/disciplining or “state apparatus” for, as Rancière clarifies, where the use of the latter term presupposes an opposition between State and society, police assumes a spontaneity of social relations and at the same time the rigidity of state functions.⁸³ The distinguishing trait of this mode of partition is that it recognises neither lack nor supplement: the totality of community consists of compact groups which are “tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to

⁸⁰ Ibid., §20.

⁸¹ Davide Panagia, “Partage du sensible”: The distribution of the sensible”, in Jean-Philippe Deranty (ed.), *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Ltd, 2010), 102.

⁸² Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 82.

⁸³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29.

these occupations and these places”.⁸⁴ Police refers to a universe in which everyone has a place for abode according to their competencies, to their ways of saying and being that are reflected in their position in the community. This arrangement distributes places and roles, that is, allocates ways of being, according to what is considered “proper” for each one, legitimising this distribution in the name of the achievement of consensus of the community. It is a partition of the sensible that leaves no void.

The police, then, is the democratic regime as perceived by Rawls, Taylor and Young, since for each of them democracy is about the successful allocation of comprehensive doctrines, horizons, or social groups. It is the identification of a community with a specific way of being and therefore the confinement of the subject to a role. It is the limitation of democracy to an abode, to an ethos. For as we have seen in Chapter One and as Rancière reminds us,

before recalling law, morality or value, ethos indicates the abode (*sejour*). Further it indicates the way of being that corresponds to this abode, the way of feeling and thinking which belongs to whoever occupies any given place.⁸⁵

Ethos, then, may be one form produced by, or in accordance with, the logic of the police. It is a police tool to tame the *demos* through their synchronisation with the specific demands of the community. For Rancière, ethos is perceivable only in its collective dimension, it is a dangerous form of suppression and it is anti-democratic. Although I find this explanation illuminating, I think that it is one-dimensional and that if it is enriched with a simultaneous reading of the individual component of ethos (a task that I attempt latter in the chapter), it can give us a more productive account of ethos, one that can be utilised in favour of democracy.

⁸⁴ Rancière, “Ten theses on politics”, §21.

⁸⁵ Jacques Rancière, “Thinking between disciplines: An aesthetics of knowledge” *Parrhesia* 1(2006), 5.

If ethos is a means to control the *demos* by the police, then Rancière needs not only to suggest the latter's opposite but also ways to elevate from the one condition to the other. He conceives politics as the logic that is antithetical to the police and subjectification as the process through which the police and its ethos can be broken.

By contrast to the police, the term politics (*la politique*) is reserved for a much more narrowly determined activity which is antagonistic to policing. This differentiation between politics and police, two distinct modes of visibility characterises Rancière's political thought: politics is opposed in principle to police. It is the break with the logic of the police. It acts on the police.⁸⁶ With politics, what is perceived as the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part, those whose voice is conceived merely as noise and who thus have no place in the arrangement. Whereas the principle of police is consensus, politics is that activity which has the rationality of disagreement, of dissensus as its very own rationality.⁸⁷

Disagreement is not misrecognition or misunderstanding since it has to do not only with words but also with ways of presentation. It is disagreement that causes the disruption of the partition. And what makes politics happen is the contingency of equality, which is made evident through the introduction of a supplement or a lack: "*politics* means the supplementation of all qualifications by the power of the unqualified".⁸⁸ Politics' essence is dissensus, not as the opposition of interests and opinions, but as a gap in the sensible that makes possible the emergence of those who previously had no part. The political (*le politique*) is the encounter between these two heterogenous processes, that of policing, governing and thus of a creation of community consent and that of equality.

⁸⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 33.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁸⁸ Jacques Rancière, "Does democracy mean something?", in Jacques Rancière and Steven Corcoran (ed.), *Jacques Rancière: Dissensus on Politics and Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 53.

So according to Rancière, politics does not exist as an organising mechanism; it happens at the conjunction of police logic and egalitarian logic through mechanisms of subjectification (or subjectivation- *la subjectivation*). That is, it takes place as the revelation of a wrong done to a part of the community and as “the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience”.⁸⁹ As such, the process of political subjectification is a manifestation of a gap between an acknowledged part and those having no part. Most importantly, it “does not create subjects ex nihilo; it creates them by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of functions and places into instances of experience of a dispute”.⁹⁰ This is why Rancière characterises this process as a ‘disidentification’: it is a process by which a political subject denies the place she was (not) given in the order of the community, that is the established categories of identification and classification, she perceives it as a wrong and decides that in order to make her voice heard she needs to break with these categories and elevate to a different space. In these terms, subjectification is a heterology.⁹¹ In getting involved in this process the political subject engages in an enactment of equality which takes place not in self or culture of a group, but at the top of an argument. This is also why Rancière sees politics as being in principle aesthetic: because it allows to be heard/seen what was inaudible/invisible, by inscribing a new name that is different from any thus far recognised part of the community. Politics is first of all a battle about perceptible/sensible material.⁹² But this acknowledgement of the aesthetic component of politics does not lead Rancière to seek the political everywhere and rehash the easy conclusion that “everything is political”; his logic of politics presupposes that the political emerges specifically when the police logic and the egalitarian logic meet.

⁸⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹¹ Rancière, “Politics, identification, and subjectivization”, 62.

⁹² Guénoun, Kavanagh, Lapidus, “Jacques Rancière: Literature, politics, aesthetics”, 11.

The logic of political subjectivation espoused by Rancière presupposes a definition of the political subject as the subject that bears a capacity for staging scenes of dissensus, polemical scenes where equality emerges. It also presupposes the rejection of any distinction between people who live in different spheres and thus the dismissal of categories of who is and is not qualified for political life.⁹³ Political subjects are so defined not on account of their identity, but because they are between different identities. According to this logic of politics, identities such as that of the citizen do not belong to individuals: they occur through mechanisms and singular manifestations.⁹⁴ A community is political, then, not on account of the existence of something in common among its members, but on account of a sharing of what is not given as being in-common, of what they are commonly denied by the police order. For Rancière, politics is best articulated in terms of relations, but not of power: relationships between different worlds.⁹⁵

His perception of politics as aesthetic, as the process of displacement of the political subject from one position to another in order to become visible or audible, is the defining element of Rancière's vision of democracy. He affirms, then, democracy as the subjectification mode par excellence, for it is in this specific mode that the partition becomes perceptible. This takes place through the articulation of a wrong, what now can be stated as "a mode of subjectification in which the assertion of equality takes its political shape".⁹⁶ Therefore, like Wolin, he refuses to accept democracy as a form of government, as a political regime characterised by its culture of pluralism and tolerance. Rather, democracy is the polemic disturbance of the police order that calls into question the aesthetic coordinates of perception, thought and action, and aspires to changing them. It is the symbolic institution of the political in the form of the power of those who are not entitled to exercise power: it is a rupture in the order of legitimacy and domination.⁹⁷ It is in this

⁹³ Jacques Rancière, "Who is the subject of the rights of man?", in Rancière and Corcoran, *Jacques Rancière: Dissensus*, 69.

⁹⁴ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 31.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁷ Rancière and Panagia, "Dissenting words, 124.

sense that Rancière identifies democracy with politics: in the form of democracy, politics is already in place.⁹⁸ The essence of democracy is the same with the essence of politics, that is dissensus: a surplus of subjects that introduce, in the saturated order of the police, a surplus of subjects.⁹⁹ The latter do not form a coherent social group that exists as a unified unit among others in the police order: they form a specific polemical community that exists entirely within the act of manifestation of dissensus. Thus defined, democracy is not a state of being but a redistribution of places: a new topography.

Plato, says Rancière, despite his fervent opposition to democracy, was the first to articulate the democratic paradox in political philosophy: it is a paradox because it affirms the power of those who have none, the 'unaccounted'. The subject of democracy, the *demos*, is not the body of the people, the mere sum of the population; it is those who speak when they are not supposed to, and partake in ruling (and in being ruled) while lacking the proper qualifications to govern. It is those who suspend all logics of legitimate domination.¹⁰⁰ It is an excessive part, favoured by the pure addition of "chance", that evokes the disruption of the logic of the *arkhe*, the logic that appropriates subjects to particular positions according to principles of birth or wealth. Its formation is random and incidental, subject to a constant reformulation according to specific instances.

It is his distinction of politics from the police that leads Rancière to condemn ethos and its possible link with the political. The latter, as already discussed, appears when the logic of the police is interrupted by the logic of equality, hence its inherent democratic character. Ethos, on the other hand, became the tool in the hands of Plato to bury democracy — and with it the political — under the pretenses of the original community and the just society suitable to it. According to Plato, says Rancière, a true community — in contrast to the democratic ignorant community — is one in which the measure that governs the community is directly incorporated into the living

⁹⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 62.

⁹⁹ Rancière and Panagia, "Dissenting Words", 124.

¹⁰⁰ Rancière, "Ten theses on politics", §14.

attitudes of its members.¹⁰¹ What this perception of community requires is the elimination of politics and its identification with an order, with police. It is the identification of the members of a community with the community's rules and principles, that is with its ethos, that constitutes a well-functioning political community. When the private component of ethos is attuned with the collective, the ideal polity is attainable. How far away is this logic from Taylor's vision for a strong collective commitment, for a civic patriotism that will bind individuals to their communities? This is the model of politics (or police?) that Rancière fears the most.

It is the model of politics that Plato introduces, one of the three avatars of political philosophy: *archipolitics*, the other two being *parapolitics* and *metapolitics*. The logic that governs this figure is the configuration of politics with nothing left over and therefore the distribution of every and any member of the community in a specific place, in a way that seems plausible due to their proper and natural competencies. The founding myth of the three races and the three respective metals in Book III of the *Republic* proposes the fabrication of this arrangement.¹⁰² Plato's archipolitics is based on the existence of the law as the ethos of the community and of each of its members, it is the harmony of ethos, the accord between the *character* of the individuals and the *moral values* of the collective.¹⁰³ It is the identification of the regime with the character of its citizens and hence, according to Rancière, it is the repression of politics.

Rancière's worry is that today we live the times of the appearance of this repression hidden under the mask of the return of the political (along with the return of political philosophy) and this is directly connected to the so-called ethical turn. As he clarifies, this turn by no means suggests that now political action is determined or driven by moral judgements; rather, what is at stake is the formation of an indiscernible sphere in which not only the distinctiveness of political actions is dissolved, but so is also the distinction between fact and law. Rancière suggests that the current ethical turn can be understood as the kind of thinking that seeks to establish an identity between

¹⁰¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 3.

¹⁰² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 65.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 68.

an environment, a way of being and a principle of action.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the term morality, which implies a division of what is and what ought to be, that is of law and fact, the ethical turn favours the suppression of this division, a phenomenon that has a special name: consensus, which “defines a mode of symbolic structuration of the community that evacuates the political core constituting it, that is dissensus”.¹⁰⁵ The consensus logic is based on the allocation of each and any person to a specific place, as a member of a specific group and thus on the dismissal of surplus subjects. Each of the thinkers scrutinised in Chapter Three gives an account of exactly such an allocation, a distribution of subjects that must be in synchrony with a common ethos defined in moral terms. This presupposes the configuration of what Rancière calls a field of perception-in-common, that is a specific mode of partition of the perceptible which at least as far as politics is concerned entails the affirmation of choices as objective and univocal.¹⁰⁶ In other words, it presupposes the existence of a common shared social space, in which groups to which subjects belong may eulogise the decisions and choices made by experts in strictly defined fields. Consensus is the reduction of democracy to an ethos, that is, to a specific way of life which is nothing less than the dwelling and lifestyle of a specific group of the community.¹⁰⁷ It is the very negation of the political.

This consensus era is the era of postdemocracy, that is democracy after the demos. It is the era of complete identification of the community with itself, with nothing left over. This concrete community, this body of the people, is no more a demos but “the public opinion” and thus it is present in the form of its statistical reduction, “a people transformed into an object of knowledge and prediction”, people countable and identifiable by the sum of its parts.¹⁰⁸ This is the result of the ethical turn that Rancière seeks to problematise in his work: the transformation of the political community into an ethical community,

¹⁰⁴ Jacques Rancière, “The ethical turn of aesthetics and politics”, in Rancière and Corcoran, *Jacques Rancière: Dissensus*, 184.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 188.

¹⁰⁶ Rancière and Panagia, “Dissenting words”, 123.

¹⁰⁷ Rancière, “Who is the subject of the rights of man?”, in Rancière and Corcoran, *Jacques Rancière: Dissensus*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 105.

that is its transformation from a community of dissensus and division (which by definition it is) into a community in which everyone is counted. He opposes the view of society as envisioned by thinkers like Young, that is as a mosaic of parts, minorities and majorities, social and other groups, where everyone is included and has a priori its place in one of them. The ethical turn entails necessarily seeing society in this way: it is demanded in the name of consensus. There is no doubt that Plato would give to this a smile of approbation: postdemocracy *is* the realisation of archipolitics. What he envisioned as being the ideal state, the *politeia*, that is the community which achieves its own principle of interiority in all manifestations of its life by the assimilation of its laws to ways of life, is today achieved through consensus.¹⁰⁹ It is the substitution of policing for politics, where the law is the spirit of community. It is a generalised citizenship (see for example Young's ideas for an enlarged community ethos). In postdemocracy everyone is included; it is the regime most suitable to "a world cleansed of surplus identities";¹¹⁰ there is no miscount, no wrong, no politics.

For Rancière the current dead end of political reflection and action is due to the identification of politics with the self of a community, that is the use of the idea of ethos to cover over the gap or schism that inaugurates any political order,¹¹¹ identifying the law of the community with its ethos. This ethology of the community hides the gap between police and politics. But politics cannot draw on such an identification. This is one of the points where Rancière's work on aesthetics converges and intersects with his political work. He affirms the operation of what is called the politics of aesthetics as having the same results with the ethical turn in politics: the effacement of democracy. As he argues, to perceive art not as expression but as a process of self-education entails the formation of a new sensorium, of a new ethos and on a large scale, of a new collective ethos.¹¹² The politics of aesthetics, with its

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 64

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 124.

¹¹¹ Rancière, "Politics, identification, and subjectivization", 59.

¹¹² Jacques Rancière, "The aesthetic revolution and its outcomes: Employments of autonomy and heteronomy" *New Left Review* 14 (2002), 137.

promise for a non-polemical, consensual framing for the common world, is the politics of consensual postdemocracy.

It is his perception of the late-modern condition as the era of the reign of postdemocracy, of this metapolitical formation which negates any idea of the political, that guides and structures Rancière's work around a central concern: "how are we to reinvent politics?"¹¹³ His response to this formidable challenge lies in his vision of democracy, summarised thus:

Democracy, in fact, cannot be merely defined as a political system, one among many, characterised simply by another division of power. It is more profoundly defined as a certain sharing of the perceptible, a certain redistribution of its sites. And what orders this redistribution is the very fact of literarity: the "orphan" system of writing, on reserve, the system of those spaces of writing that, with their overpopulated void and their overtalkative silence, riddle the living cloth of the communal ethos.¹¹⁴

Democracy is only meaningful when perceived as the logic of the polemical distribution of the sensible; when insensible elements in society challenge the policing order and raise from their position to temporarily inhabit a new place. It is in this sense that democratic action is aesthetic: it is the configuration of a demand to be seen or heard by those who struggle to take part while they have no part, and so to "make the invisible visible, to give a name to the anonymous and to make words audible where only noise was perceptible before. It creates separation in a community, making room for debate therein".¹¹⁵ For Rancière democracy is a process of political subjectification and as such it presupposes exactly a break with ethos, because the logic of the latter entails a division of another kind: between those who are and those who are not worthy of engaging in politics. The logic of ethos is for Rancière anti-political.

¹¹³ Rancière, "Politics, identification, and subjectivization", 64.

¹¹⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 104.

¹¹⁵ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 85.

Rancière's sharp distinction between police and politics, as well as the equation of democracy with politics, provides a useful tool for the specification of political activity against a fixed background and thus for its affirmation as radical and irruptive. However, his absoluteness with regard to the orderliness of police and the unavailability of remainders is far from unproblematic. For if police is indeed an absolutely concrete whole, then how does politics and hence democracy erupt? Moreover, despite his affirmation of the indispensability of police for the generation of the political moment, as well as his observation that some police orders are preferable than others, Rancière does not provide us with a "distinction in the characterisation of policing".¹¹⁶ That said, if we accept that a kind of police order is not only unavoidable but also required so that the rarity of politics is achieved, there should be also some criteria of judging what this order would be. Rancière does not engage in a discussion with regard to this aspect of the police, that is he does not discriminate between regimes that would be acceptable provided that they allow space for some political engagement and regimes that are suppressive. In his effort to prove the role of the police, Rancière provides only a generalisation of late modern forms of political organisation that discredit liberal democracy all together.

A crucial question, then, is what could such an eruptive vision of democracy contribute to the battle against police, against the established order of governance that regulates individuals' economic and political lives in late-modernity? It is obvious that democracy does not have duration and upon its completion we return to the police order. Is democracy as envisioned by Rancière an action of dissonance only for the sake of dissonance? I believe the answer is negative. Democracy erupts not merely as an expression of dissonance, but as a condemnation of a wrong done to people; it is the articulation of a claim for equality. As such, it needs to be judged not only for the results it produces, but also for the re-allocation of political bodies it generates. Perhaps, then, the crucial question articulated above is in fact

¹¹⁶ Michael Dillon, "(De)void of politics? A response to Jacques Rancière's 'Ten theses on politics'" *Theory and Event* 6, no. 4 (2003), §16.

related to precisely the new forms of identification it brings about. For as Aletta Norval argues it is exactly the problem of subjectivity that needs to be addressed in our discussions on democracy, whereas Rancière fails to treat the invention of new names at any length.¹¹⁷ In other words, Rancière's equation of subjectification with disidentification entails the acceptance of the presumption that any identification already belongs to the police order. This presumption poses serious barriers in the formation of what Mouffe would call "chains of equivalence" or Connolly "collective assemblages" through which the articulation of democratic demands can be achieved.

A more radical problem concerning Rancière's perception of politics can be developed across the line of his de-politicisation argument, that is of the idea that we live in a post-political era. Such is the critique articulated by political thinkers such as Jodi Dean, who sees in Rancière's approach a recognition of defeat on the left. As she puts it very schematically, "It's like the left is saying, "if we don't get to play what we want, we're not going to play".¹¹⁸ The denial of a condition (in this case that the rules of the game are set by the right) and its characterisation or rather its declassification (as post-political) does not do justice to the part that makes the claim (in this case the left). Furthermore, the post-political thesis is itself invalid, since the success of politics of the right both in the United States and in Europe is indicative of the opposite. As Dean says, there are political achievements attained by the various political forces, the right included, and by overlooking them by focusing on post-politics we merely miss a possible target of condemnation.

The democratic imaginary envisioned by Rancière is based on two pillars: the universality of equality and the opposition of the logic of politics to the logic of the police, where the former is identified with democracy and the latter with its suppression. At the same time, police also represents the condition of democracy's existence. But as I will argue in the final chapter of the thesis, this discrimination that Rancière makes is too bold, since it is based on a binary (order/stability versus disruption/change) which over-emphasises one aspect of any given "order" and does not do honour to the internal dynamism which characterises it. It is this stark discrimination that

¹¹⁷ Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 143.

¹¹⁸ Jodi Dean, "Politics without politics" *Parallax* 15, no. 3 (2009), 23.

leads Rancière to affirm the return to the police order as the one and only outcome of every democratic moment. By lamenting this development as unavoidable, I believe that he fails to appreciate the interaction between established structures and emerging powers which can transform the structure without necessarily aspiring to demolish it. This is a task undertaken in the next chapter of the thesis, where I attend to binaries such as those haunting Rancière's thought and try to go beyond them.

In focusing his analysis on the importance of the interruption of the police by politics, that is of a continuum by a moment of disagreement, Rancière aims to stress the importance of the political moment, and thus to suggest the conceptualisation of democracy in terms of interactive moments of rupture within the operation of systems.¹¹⁹ That said, he suggests a temporalisation of politics, a perception of politics as an event, politics specified in the precise moment and place of eruption of the uncounted and disruption of the ethos that belongs to what is understood as the political community: "Politics, in its specificity, is rare. It is always local and occasional".¹²⁰ The usefulness of this perception notwithstanding, in my argumentation in the next chapter I revisit this idea of the disruptive politics, in order to suggest the possibility of perceiving democratic politics not as an event *per se*, but as a sequence of events embraced in their ordinariness.

At the same time, Rancière also offers a localisation of politics, that is politics as the shift of bodies from a place where they could not be seen or heard, to a place of perception. Democracy is the interruption not only of continuous time but of a corporeal order as well. It is on this account that he rejects the notion of an ethos affirmed as an abode. And it is on this account that Rancière's work on democracy, important and informative as it is, can be read with and against the work of Sheldon Wolin.

¹¹⁹ Davide Panagia, "The predicative function in ideology: On the political uses of analogical reasoning in contemporary political thought" *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6, no. 1 (2001), 69.

¹²⁰ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 139.

III. The Encounter

The two thinkers brought together in this chapter exemplify radical democratic thought in that they both conceive of democracy in its spatial and temporal specificity, against a background of established regimes of elitism and inequality. The purpose here is not to exaggerate their points of convergence, but rather to indicate how two projects that share a faith in equality and the power of the people, that both envision democracy as a kind of disruption, depart in one significant point: their perception of ethos and its role in the processes and conditions of democratic enunciation. This section suggests that it is by bringing them together that we can assess ways in which each may inform the other in a way that enhances them and renders them yet more pertinent to the circumstances they seek to address.

The radicalism of the democratic visions espoused by Wolin and Rancière lies in their affirmation of democracy not as a form of government but as a disruption of sequences. On the one hand, for Wolin democracy is about what is in common for otherwise diverse individuals and so entails the fugitive displacement of differences for the sake of an episodic commonality and hence the shift from a locus of individuality to one of collectivity. This shift takes place in everyday life through practices developed by established networks of action. On the other hand, for Rancière democracy is to be better understood as a process of subjectification and therefore a shift of a body from a place assigned to it, a change in its destination. This shift is only spasmodic and occasional.

Both thinkers suggest that in democracy there is a flux, a displacement of the subject from a specific site to another, where it joins subjects with a common purpose and that it is because of and through this very mobility that the subject becomes political. Democracy is the break with the order of the managerial state or of the police. It is the construction of commonalities that, fugitive and ephemeral as they may be, are the essence of democracy. As they refrain from recognising the political in a given order, that being a regime of inverted totalitarianism (Wolin) or police (Rancière), they also refrain from seeing as political the subject that merely exists within this order, as

producer, worker, consumer or bearer of any identity as member of a group. That is, both thinkers recognise the ambiguity of the political subject and the fugitive nature of the demos.

This affirmation of the fluctuating political body, which under certain circumstances will join some individuals for the support of a cause, leads both thinkers to value political community as formless and impermanent. Rancière articulates the issue using the logic of disparity and thus considers as the criterion for the definition of political community not the aim of realisation of a common essence, but rather the sharing of what is not given as being in common. Wolin prefers to emphasise the joint, what is perceived as common on a specific time and location. For example, where Rancière is unwilling to discern citizenship as a property, and affirms it only as an occurrence, Wolin values citizenship as an irreplaceable identity and seeks to enrich it.¹²¹ This difference notwithstanding, both thinkers abstain from recognising *the* demos as *the* democratic subject par excellence, at least to the degree that this would entail a too tight and specific definition. Instead they prefer to see the demos as the contingent outcome of the processes of subjectification they both appreciate as indispensable to the occurrence of democracy. In this way they both express their faith in the capacity of ordinary people not merely to participate, but indeed to make democracy happen. It is contingency, not coherence that they value the most.

In both cases the driving force is what Rancière calls a declaration of a wrong, or in other words equality: this is the core of the democratic visions of both Rancière and Wolin and the basis for the eruption of the democratic moment. Both build their visions against a dark background of structural inequality, of the corporate state managed by highly qualified, profit-spirited professionals on the one hand, and of a police order that aims at the flawless allocation of bodies on the other. The purpose of both regimes is to disallow equality, for this would entail either the endangerment of capitalism or the recognition of the sheer contingency of any social order. The contingent ordinary individuals (Rancière's proletarians) that will form the fugitive political communities are drawn to democracy exactly to declare the wrong

¹²¹ "The old citizenship must be replaced by a fuller and wider notion of being whose politicalness will be expressed not in one or two modes of activity-voting or protesting-but in many", Wolin, "What revolutionary action means today", 251.

done against them and it is in this moment when they join forces that democracy actually happens and is experienced. The unity of the political community, then, is one that is prompted by a shared feeling of resentment. Hence the polemical character of the demos.

This is a point where the Wolin and Rancière diverge significantly. Where Wolin perceives the “moments of commonality” experienced by his political community, fugitive and impermanent as they may be, as being infused in an important and effective sense by a shared civic ethic, Rancière denies and denounces such a possibility. To begin with, Wolin finds in the decline of a public democratic ethic a reason for concern and his work suggests that this void needs to be filled by some kind of ethos. Rancière, on the other hand, sees in the concept of ethos a synonym for the archaic abode and hence domestication and limitation: it is an ambient milieu that too tightly confines politics and therefore represents the place of comfort, harmony and habit, a continuum that bears no political element whatsoever and for this reason needs to be disrupted. Contra Wolin, Rancière claims that people are not drawn to democracy because they are inspired by an ethos of any kind. As he puts it, “[i]t is not their ethos, their way of being that disposes individuals to democracy but a break with this ethos, the gap experienced between the capability of the speaking being and any ethical harmony of doing, being and saying”.¹²² Rancière’s democracy is indeed the break with ethos. Wolin is in agreement with him here only so far as the need for devaluation of the corporate ethos. He does not seem to be comfortable with the idea of a society that does not share an ethos, even though such a society does not fall within his definition of the political society. Ethos in its collective component is a source for political mobilisation for Wolin but for Rancière it is no more than a source for individuals’ anaesthetisation.

That Rancière’s work on democracy significantly diverges from Wolin’s when it comes to the issue of ethos is also evident with regard to the latter’s second component, the individual. For whereas Wolin’s perception of ethos addresses both components, Rancière does not treat the issue of a democratic ethos in its individual dimension at any length. Indeed, in Wolin ethos on the one hand plays the role of a “supportive culture of beliefs,

¹²² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 101.

values and practices” (the public component that refers to the community),¹²³ and on the other appears as the trait borne by the individual (the private component). In the latter case, ethos needs to be cultivated through what Wolin in his later work calls “the democratisation of the self”.¹²⁴ Democracy as a reaction to the current condition as envisioned by Wolin has recourse to ethos to support itself: Wolin recognises the indispensability of ethos in political life, whereas Rancière fails to do so because he attends only to its public aspect. Most importantly, Wolin seems to honour the interplay between the public and the private dimension of ethos, the interchange that informs and revitalises both, even though he does so in a paradoxical way. For instance, he envisions the cultivation of an elite of public servants to counter the corporate elite of managed democracy, and who would be possessed of “a commitment to promoting and defending democratic values, lessening the inequities in our society, and protecting the environment”.¹²⁵ Wolin wants us to think that this vision does not refer to a new bureaucracy bearing the special label of a democratic one, but to an assemblage of devotees to a variety of causes who all are committed to democracy and serve it at the local level. But this is not so far away from Rancière’s worst nightmare - the creation of an elite that has power to guide political life. Wolin’s affirmation of the intersection of a private and a public ethic takes place within a highly ambiguous framework.

This is the point where the work of the two thinkers can benefit from an exchange. For unless Rancière’s dissensual, irruptive democracy, inspirational and even provocative as it is, is infused with a perception of ethos in its individual dimension, it will be politically untenable, ethically undesirable and too much a theoretical fancy. What is suggested here is that Rancière’s reluctance to recognise the role for an ethic in his democratic vision, for the fear of assimilation and/or elimination of the appearance of the wrong, renders his vision susceptible to highjacking from those who would seek to exploit the disagreement he espouses for reactionary practices that are democratic only in appearance. That is, unless the subjects of such a

¹²³ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 260-1.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

dissensus democracy infuse their claim with a democratic ethical disposition, the process of their subjectification may end up as the production of subjectivities far less political than Rancière hopes and envisions. Moreover the absence of an ethic to sustain a dissensus democracy easily falls prey to the criticism that it lacks long term effectiveness, mobilising individuals merely for the sake of turbulence itself.

Wolin's vision, contra Rancière's, seems to appreciate otherness and the multiple possibilities for ordinary diverse people being and acting together for a political cause. Although he does not specify the content of an ethical disposition Wolin nevertheless finds that a "democratisation of the self" can lead to the discovery of commonalities and to common actions where previously there was only void and apathy. At the same time Rancière's analyses indicate ways in which Wolin's insistence on the necessity of the attunement of democracy to "the culture of everyday life" could prove dangerous. Rancière is correct to be wary of the threat that such a logic poses to the possibility of breaking with the police.

What the discussion in this chapter further reveals, then, is the ambiguity and fluidity of the concept of ethos. The parallel reading of the thinkers attempted here enables us to see how ethos is too ambiguous a concept, since it is open to multiple articulations and interpretations. Rancière is correct to argue that conceiving of ethos as 'abode', in the sense of harmonisation of the character of the individual with the values of the collective in which they must be housed, is anti-political. The absence of antagonism, and the domestication of the individual within the collective is definitively anti-democratic. But the problem here is not ethos as such. It is ethos conceived only in its public aspect, as a perennial and persistent public political culture, external and prior to the members of the polis yet shared by them. Conversely, then, Wolin is correct to stress the importance of commonalities and of a process of "democratisation of the self" in the creation of democratic practices. This is why I suggest that a democratic ethos fluctuates between a public ethic and a personal disposition, without ever being reduced or limited to either. The method of complementary reading that I followed in this chapter shows that each of the two thinkers brings to our attention different aspects

and possible dangers that ethos carries. Where Rancière helps us to appreciate the interruptive role of democratic practices and at the same time to refuse the idea of a strong public ethos in the classical sense, Wolin enables us to appreciate better the interplay between these two components of the democratic ethos and the strenuous work demanded if the harmonisation and attunement are to be avoided. At the same time, the work of both these thinkers helps us to explicate how certain binaries (everydayness/irruption, active/passive) inhabit and indeed haunt political thought, as well as how we can revisit these binaries in order to fight them. Democratic ethos is too ambiguous, fluid and dynamic a concept to be contained within an 'abode' understood in spatial terms. As we shall see in the next chapter it is only by appreciating its temporal dimension that we are able to catch ethos at its democratic frequency.



Chapter 6

Towards a *Metical* Ethos for Democracy

The theorists scrutinised in the previous two chapters mark out the space of a discussion concerning the ethotic dimension of democracy. Connolly, Mouffe and Wolin each, in different ways, present an argument for the importance of ethos in democratic experience. Rancière refutes this, emphasising the potentially undemocratic aspects of too strong a concept of ethos. However, his democratic project, like that of Wolin, emphasises the spatio-temporal dimension of democratic moments and draws our attention to its experiential dimension.

This final chapter takes up the task of considering how the limits of theories of ethos may be overcome and an ethos of democracy developed which does not risk reinforcing an ideal or an ethical category too stable and fixed to adapt to the shifting challenges of the democratic *agon*. It is suggested here that such a response can be formulated by way of attending to the importance of the specificity of the democratic moment and therefore of the temporal peculiarity of the democratic experience but, at the same moment, avoiding the trap of excessive glorification of the event.

Section I puts the chapter in the context of the thesis and discusses the argument made here with relevance to the work of the theorists examined so far. It makes the case for the importance of the ethotic dimension of democracy, while suggesting that this should be conceived along temporal and experiential lines.

Section II opens a discussion on the role of binaries in political thought and suggests that dichotomies such as ordinary/extra-ordinary, heroic/normal and repetition/spontaneity are over-simplifying. Instead of focusing on these, theorists of democracy need to be more attentive to the tensions between the constituents of such binaries. In the course of this discussion, the section also challenges Rancière's conceptualisation of democracy as a rarity, its confinement to a condition of emergency that appears only to disrupt an already established and hence apolitical order. The approach pursued here affirms democratic politics not as the eruptive moment *per se*,

but as the productive tension between such multiple moments and established practices of politics. It suggests, then, that the ordinary does not necessarily entail stability and stillness and therefore an order that needs to be disrupted if democracy is to happen. Rather, I follow Bonnie Honig's call for political theory to stop identifying action with event, and politics with singularity but instead to "de-exceptionalise the emergency".¹ It is in this context that the section discusses the importance of the possibilities emerging from ordinary democratic practices, following a call made by Wolin, and puts forward the argument for a democratic vision that honours democracy in its plurality and complexity.

Section III takes on another binary, that of passivity/activity and following both Rancière and Deleuze discusses how the spectator is not necessarily a passive receiver of messages transmitted by a higher centre but can also be a democratic subject. In showing a way beyond the passive/active binary I take silence as an example, showing how it may be affirmed as a politicised modality, as a way of acting politically. I then make the case for a conception of democracy in which repetition is not exclusive of spontaneity and attendance to voice is not the *sine qua non* of democratic acting.

The interlude that precedes the last section clarifies the democratic vision developed in this chapter; irreducibly agonistic, due to its fluid and multifarious essence, this democracy requires an ethic which is responsive to the moment in which it is enacted. In this way, the interlude clears the ground for the argument developed in the last section: that a democratic ethos appropriate to momentary (not necessarily defined as the opposite of "lasting") and experiential (so far as it is informed *also* by sensibilities on the visceral register) democracy must be affirmed in its ambiguity, fluidity and openness and hence, following Rancière, not as an abode but as visiting a moment, an impermanent dwelling in a moment of democratic practicing. In this logic, the classic interplay between the public and private components of ethos discussed in the first chapter (but also embraced by Wolin) is reformulated. Heidegger's perception of ethos (already discussed in the first chapter) is pertinent here, but it is a critical revision of it that helps us to

¹ Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

elaborate a specifically democratic ethos understood as our comportment towards the peculiar circumstances we encounter, and thus as our dwelling in the moment (rather than in a place). The task here is to thematise the fluid attitude that informs and characterises our practices (tactics) and which is adaptable and transformable according to the peculiarities of the moment. In this context, it is suggested that an ethos informed by the mental category of *metis* or cunning intelligence better corresponds to the demands of the agonistic and kaleidoscopic democracy embraced here.

I. The ethotic dimension of democracy

Chapter Five considered how theorists of a radical democracy affirm the significance of democracy as lying in its corrective role with regard to the restoration of equality. In so doing they perceive it in terms of a dissensus that erupts at the specific moment in which an otherwise contingent group of individuals share a temporary commonality. The importance of such an understanding of democracy lies in the way in which it allows us to affirm the multiplicity of the common goods available to us today, and in the fact that it shows that what is at stake in democracy is exactly the disagreement with regard to these common goods and the means by which they can be pursued. Thus stated, the spatio-temporal vision of democracy endorsed by Wolin and Rancière not only provides an innovative and radical way to think about what democracy is and can be, but also enriches the ways we engage in democratic life today. This chronological determination, this “today”, is important, for the work of these two theorists is developed in the context of a specific articulation of the late-modern condition and, indeed, is a response to the challenges posed for democracy and the forms of democratic subjectivisation by the forces of capitalism, the drastic social changes and the alteration of the environmental scene, as well as the interactions between these three axes and others.

The work of William Connolly, with its exegesis of the catalytic impact of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine on the formation of current ethico-political complexes, and his proposal for a creation of contagious

resonances as a form of counter-action, provides an equally important articulation of the democratic possibilities available to us today. Indeed, his emphasis on the layered interactions of thinking and embodied sensibilities cultivated on multiple levels make his work on democracy exemplary and central to the argument of the thesis. At the same time, however, Wolin and Rancière focus specifically on the disruptive dimension of democracy, on the particular and temporary expression of a commonality that is fugitive and impermanent, with all the limitations and challenges that such an approach to the democratic entails. This aspect of their work is most relevant to the task undertaken here on the ethotic dimension of democracy.

The (formless) form of this ethos is one that most comports with the perception of democracy in its disruptive dimension, as discussed by Wolin and Rancière. My discussion seeks to problematise the fact that ethos has a delimiting nature at the same time, while the same discussion attributes to democracy an experiential dimension as advocated by William Connolly, without being confined to it. Moreover, it comes to supplement Mouffe's perception of a democratic ethos as consisting merely in already established practices and identifications.

The argument here is that a kind of ethos that infuses our engagement in democratic theorising and experience not only is indispensable but, if it is to be pertinent to the contemporary condition, specifically needs to be perceived across these two dimensions of democracy: the momentary and experiential. This is not to suggest that democracy ought now to be reduced to an instinct or a spontaneous response, for this would be a far too weak and naive image of democracy and would have little to contribute to its present and future. Rather, it is to say that already established norms, codes, practices and institutions must be blended and infused with a combination of cultivated sensibilities (such as those suggested by Connolly), and spontaneous disruptive reactions to the peculiarities of the moment. This entails the enrichment of our understanding of ways of democratic action and of democracy itself. Hence Mouffe's work is most pertinent. What is needed is a way to make new "vocabularies" available to those engaged in democracy. These can enable practices and forms of grassroots democracy conducive to a broader understanding and appreciation of the democratic

possibilities of the current condition. Concerning the latter, not only is there no reason for lament, but on the contrary it is productive to perceive current challenges as an opportunity to be embraced and indeed capitalised upon for multifarious lines of action. The idea of a democratic ethos espoused in this chapter, then, is inspired by the work of the four thinkers discussed in the previous two chapters, but at the same time it takes a certain distance from them. Finding recourse to the disruptive dimension of democracy adopted by Wolin and Rancière, it departs from the former's conviction that there already exists a collective culture that encourages citizens to join in common endeavours and hence that a collective preexisting ethos is the driving force of a momental democracy. Rather, and without completely refuting the role that a "common code of conduct", in Mouffe's terms, has for democracy, it is argued here that there is something more specifically political in ethos when it is to be discussed in its momental dimension. A democratic ethos needs to be understood not as a pre-political category, but as the specific ethic that infuses democratic action the moment it is performed: a democratic ethos is one produced at that very moment. At the same time, the idea of a democratic ethos embraced here also departs from Rancière's renunciation of the category of ethos. The chapter argues that his position against ethos is related to his failure to affirm it as something other than an abode and, more specifically, in its individual dimension. Connolly's more individualistic approach proves to be helpful in its emphasis upon the role of sensibilities cultivated on the ethical, visceral register in shaping radical democratic responses to the grievances and opportunities with which the current condition confronts us.

Blending these inspirations and refutations, the chapter makes its own contribution to the discussion concerning the importance of an ethos for radical democracy, affirmed in its disruptive and existential dimensions. For this purpose, ethos is here perceived as an existential attitude that informs our democratic practices (being either original performances or repetitions) the moment of their eruption; that is the moment of creation of new spaces for common goods. Without contending that such an approach does not favour certain sensibilities against others — for this would be a mere pretense — the argument put forward here abstains from suggesting a code

or list of principles that should govern our political behaviour. What it suggests, instead, is that an affirmation of ethos in its temporal rather than topological dimension and hence as a comportment towards the moment allows us to appreciate the possibilities for democratic action available to us through the current condition. This endeavour entails a re-assessment of democracy and of its understanding as a rare, extraordinary activity as defended by Rancière (and also Wolin in earlier elaborations of his fugitive democracy). In the place of this fugitive image, the argument in this chapter involves envisioning democracy in its ordinary dimension, that is the forms it takes through practices that fashion and enhance it. This is not to make the case against spontaneity, but, rather, to suggest that ordinary democratic practice, even in its repetition, enables and hence produces the extraordinary that is so valued by radical democratic thinkers.

The reconceptualisation of political time proves a crucial task here, since it is his perception of time in its linear dimension that urges Rancière to conceive democracy as an interruption of sequences and to affirm it only in its extraordinary dimension. By relying on a more supportive role for the ordinary in the vision of revitalising democracy, the chapter revisits Heidegger and suggests that a democratic ethos is indeed not an abode, but a visiting: it is the impermanent dwelling in a moment of democratic practicing, a way of dwelling-temporally.

II. The Extra-ordinary Banality of Democracy

The purpose of the discussion in this section is to critically assess the impact of specific binaries upon our democratic thinking and practicing. My assessment is that the logic of binaries downplays the tactical dimension of ethos, a dimension that this thesis aspires to expose. I have already discussed in the previous chapters how theorists of democracy attend to ethos over-emphasising either its individual or its collective component and I have discussed the shortcomings of this approach for the formulation of a democratic ethos. Here I wish to suggest that binaries appear in the discourse of democratic theory in ways that do not always favour the latter's

richness and possibilities. In order to explicate this suggestion in the specific context of the thesis, in this section I argue that the thinkers taken on here, although in different degrees, fall for the binary between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary in order to articulate their spatio-temporal democratic visions: they depict democracy as the extra-ordinary occurrence that erupts as the moment of disturbance of the ordinary sequence of political life. This is the case with Rancière, who embraces a dissensus democracy, but also with Wolin whose democratic vision despite appreciating a “commonality experienced as everyday reality”, still contrasts this common experience with a non-democratic everydayness played out on an economic-political system of self-interest and exploitation. In contrast, I argue that it would be more productive to affirm democracy as oscillating between these two poles, while revisiting the idea of the ordinary: instead of seeing the latter as the opposite of the event, following Deleuze it is suggested that the event is a mutation of intensities and therefore it is already placed in the context of the ordinary.

The two radical thinkers discussed in Chapter Five affirm democracy in its extra-ordinary dimension, as an occurrence that is spatially and temporally limited and thus contrasted to what might be called “routine politics”. But they do so in different intensities and degrees. Prevailing in the work of Rancière is an image of democracy as a process of politicising a territory monopolised by the state, of enlarging a public sphere so that it includes those who are normally excluded in a private sphere as mere individuals or consumers; hence it is a process of blurring the limits of a given distribution, a process of subjectification, a shift of bodies from one place to another. There is a spatial specification of democracy, so far as its essential work is the configuration of its own space. To be sure, this is not to suggest that for Rancière politics happens in a specific place: it has neither proper place nor natural subjects.² Instead, it is to suggest that the irruptive nature he attributes to democracy leads Rancière to an appreciation of its spatially dislocating forces that erupt in a specific moment only to allow a subsequent return to the condition of the police order. For him democracy is momentary, something that “occurs as an always provisional accident within the history of forms of domination”.³ It is an

² Rancière, “Ten theses on politics”, §25.

³ *Ibid.*, §18.

exception, a rupture of a normality that is characterised by stillness, stability and order. In a similar way, Sheldon Wolin affirms the democratic subject, the demos, as an actor that comes from a place outside the system to disrupt it, mobilised by widely felt and deep-seated grievances. As he puts it, the challenge for a demos thus defined is “to ‘popularise’ political institutions and practices that have become severed from popular control”.⁴ But such a demos — or rather democratic citizenries in plural — can only be formed on small, local, settings: democracy for Wolin begins at (but is not confined to) local levels. It is the logic of democracy which he embraces that dictates this localism: “Demotic rationality is rooted in a provincialism where commonality is experienced as everyday reality...”.⁵ Wolin, then, seems to appreciate more than Rancière does the normalcy of democracy. Where the latter attends to democracy as the moment that breaks the normal course of history, the former appreciates the demotic moments that take place in everyday life. Still, for both of them, democracy functions to correct what is perceived as a routine political set of sequences which are characterised by arrangement, categorisation and regularity and it comes to disturb and disarrange them fugitively and momentarily.

This confining of democracy to its extra-ordinary dimension does not favour the multiple possibilities for action and engagement offered also by its everyday and more ordinary strands. Established norms, codes and principles are also rich fields of democratic action: democracy is too complex and multifaceted to be valued only as a disruption of an order. It is better perceived as a positive multiplicity with different variegations and discernible intensities: a kaleidoscopic variation of the political that reformulates and is reformulated continuously. This perception is not very far away from Plato’s view of democracy as a charming multifaceted system. However, rather than see this as a reason for condemnation, such an understanding of democracy is productive of opportunities and possibilities for democratic thinking and practicing, present at any time.

To affirm democracy in such a variegated way is to seek to disturb the exaggeration of binaries such as ordinary/extra-ordinary, refusing to see each

⁴ Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 258.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

of the components of this dualism as exclusionary of the other. Nietzsche, in the context of developing his critique of metaphysics, condemns the belief of metaphysicians in what he calls “oppositions of values” on the grounds of their being mere “foreground estimates” or “provisional perspectives” and he doubts whether opposites even exist.⁶ These binaries can be organised around the opposed concepts of being and becoming, the latter perceived as concerning negativity and instability and the former as indicating a way to combat and encompass these features. Nietzsche does not simply propose reversing the hierarchy, favouring becoming in the place of being. Instead, he seeks to exchange their opposition for a sense of “crossing”, a condition of reciprocal relation and interchange.⁷ Rather than place the components of such dualisms into an axiological relation that would end up as the exclusion of one over the other, he perceived their mutual participation in a more complex model of operating differences which they inform, shape and elongate again and again. In the context of this model, the components can be in a condition of strife and conflict, without necessarily seeking to annihilate each other. It is an expanding model of inclusion rather than exclusion.

Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on Nietzsche's rethinking of binary oppositions with their dynamic image of the rhizome that, in contrast to the tree, ceaselessly expands its heterogenous parts to establish new relations towards diverse directions.⁸ We have already seen how Connolly brings this image into democratic theory to support his vision of multidimensional, rhizomatic pluralism consisting of assemblages that expand and co-participate in sustaining a model of agonistic democracy. What I want specifically to scrutinise here is how Rancière and Wolin's visions of eruptive and momentary democracy can be incorporated in such a logic without confining democracy's value to that of an extraordinary event and thus without placing it against a background of stillness to which it is contrasted

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §2.

⁷ Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8-9.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

and aims to demolish. To be sure, it is not suggested here that binaries can be completely abandoned. As Deleuze observes they are inevitable because they are already in language. The question, then, is not how we “get rid of them” but rather how we “fight against” them by making language “flow between” them.⁹ Deleuze suggests that a way to do so is through stammering, through inserting new elements that may repeat themselves, but through this repetition allow for the emergence of new flows. Not escaping, then, from binaries but finding ways to insert new elements in and between them to create multiplicities - that is the point.

To work within the space created between binaries is to soften, curve and finally disturb them. I believe that it is more productive to affirm democracy as oscillating between its ordinary and extra-ordinary components, without being reducible to either of them. Bonnie Honig and Aletta Norval with their elaborations of binaries prove to be a good source of inspiration here. Honig’s call to “de-exceptionalise the emergency” is in fact an endeavour to undo the binary democracy/emergency. She suggests that this can be achieved by viewing democracy as a form of politics that is always in emergence in response to everyday emergencies of maintenance.¹⁰ In this attempt Honig scrutinises the extra-ordinariness of everyday politics by focusing on the paradox of politics itself, that is the persistent, irresolvable and yet productive paradox in which a multitude must be (re)shaped into a people not occasionally, but daily. There is no such thing as a pure general will, only plural conflicting agents, neither a common good, only plural common *goods* and such postulates would better be replaced with an acceptance of this “impurity and an embrace of the perpetuity of political contestation made necessary by that impurity”.¹¹ In taking on the paradox of politics Honig shows the possibilities for democratic thinking and living available to individuals every day and not only in cases of emergency. She shows how the time for political action and thinking is always there and that it

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 34.

¹⁰ Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xvii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

does not take a special “state of emergency” or event for this moment to become available to us.

The path followed by Norval is very different. Like Honig she seeks to emphasise the ordinary aspect of democracy while at the same time avoiding simplistic dichotomisations such as “moment of the political” against “ordinary ongoing business of politics”. In her words, “not all novelty is a radical break, neither is all tradition a mere repetition of the same”.¹² What Norval more specifically aspires to, drawing on Cavell and Wittgenstein, is a more nuanced affirmation of the relation between emerging democratic claims and established practices. Democratic subjectivity perceived in this context is to be understood both in its moment of constitution and as an ongoing process that also requires moments of reactivation. Most significantly, this account of democratic subjectivity opens the way for affirming “the importance of not reducing our understanding of community to what we share in our exclusion of, or opposition to, the other”.¹³ Norval’s task proves important for the endeavour undertaken here not merely because it bridges the moment of democratic claim with what precedes and follows it, but also because, as with Honig, she attends to the extra-ordinary potential of democracy in its most ordinary appearances.

Democracy as envisaged and endorsed here is not reduced to the moment that a democratic claim is articulated, when subjectification takes place as an event that interrupts the tedious order of everyday politics. Rather, it is suggested that democracy is to be understood as a more complex system that is mobilised by the productive tension between the ordinary daily political life and the events that disturb it. As both Honig and Norval show, there is much greater possibility in attending to this tension not only for sustaining and re-energising democratic identification, but also for affirming the inherent conflictual nature of democratic politics. The latter is dictated by the multiplicity of wills that galvanise these politics and of the appearances of these wills: there is no public good, only public goods.

It is important here to clarify that attendance to the ordinary does not necessarily imply falling for proceduralism and favouring institutionalisation of

¹² Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 180.

politics. Rather, following Honig, it can alternatively be seen as entailing commitment to the “powers of daily political practice out of which procedures and other elements of political self-governance may come but by which such daily practice is not always already guided”.¹⁴ Such a commitment suggests a non-axiological approach towards the repetition that is folded in daily life and a reappraisal of spontaneity as part of and not an antithesis to this repetition. It thus suggests an affirmation of democracy not according to the cause/effect logic but as a more open and complex model: rather than viewing democracy as the opposite of the police, perceiving it as a positive complex multiplicity of fleeting possibilities with internal differentiations and intensities in spatial and temporal layers.

That said, the ordinary is not to be necessarily contrasted with the event. The Deleuzian logic of the latter is useful here, especially when contrasted with Rancière’s appreciation of the eruptive function of the event. To be sure, Rancière’s democratic vision brings him closer to the Badiouian binary logic of the event. Like Badiou, Rancière takes a structure or order (police) as admitting no events and then he counterposes it to a moment of rupture which produces nothing beyond itself and a floating democratic subject, which, upon return to the police order, vanishes. I concur with Norval that this is a problematic point in Rancière’s work, for it does not provide an account of a positive democratic identification that would be the basis for the moments of commonality that the demos enjoys. Furthermore, the affirmation of the event of democratic eruption as contrasting with the order does not attribute to democracy its full potentialities. By contrast, the Deleuzian discussion of the event proves more supportive of the demands of the democratic vision endorsed here.

This is because, for Deleuze events are not rare: they are ubiquitous to the flows of the world, in a continuous process of evolvment and infinitely extended. Any event is to be thought of not as a disruption of a given continuous state (of a relationship or body), but rather as what constitutes this given state while transforming and mutating it. An event runs through series that constitute a multiplicity, not as an interruption but as a mutation of its intensities. These series, divergent as they are, co-exist in simultaneity

¹⁴ Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xviii.

and contemporaneity:¹⁵ an event is a change in intensity. Perhaps democracy can be affirmed as an event in this sense of an ongoing process, a series of different intensities that contribute to revitalisation and actualisation in diverse ways. From this perspective there is no question of *when* or *how often* democracy happens; the events which actualise it are omnipresent in diverse forms. Democratic possibilities are relentlessly available, even in the routine of what is perceived as “ordinary” political life. At the same time, such possibilities are also present in the everyday acts we perform. It is not the character of those acts *per se* that renders them political, but rather the very context within which they are performed. The shooting of a youngster by a policeman, for example, is not a political act in itself. However, it *becomes* political when it takes place in Exarheia, a highly politicised region at the heart of Athens and when it is interpreted as an act of power against which mass demonstrations and political events are organised.

The concept of the ordinary, affirmed as the routine, the repetitive, is not necessarily opposed to that of the event. Repetition is always already inhabited by difference and entails differentiation.¹⁶ The divergence inherent in the ordinary renders it extra-ordinary. As Heidegger puts it, “[f]undamentally, the ordinary [*geheur*] is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary, uncanny [*ungeheur*].”¹⁷ Democracy is not to be limited to the intensive events that transform it deeply and profoundly: its strength, beauty and challenge derive from the possibility, inherent within it, of creating and reproducing difference and variation through the repetition of the most ordinary elements and the enactment of prior events. Like the Nietzschean concept of the eternal recurrence, the repetition of ordinary political practices does not entail “the permanence of the same, the equilibrium state or the resting place of the identical”.¹⁸ Rather, such a repetition can serve for explaining and enhancing diversity and its reproduction. It is exactly this permanence of difference in

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), 124.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, “The origin of work of art”, in Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (eds and transl.), *Heidegger Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002), 46.

flux that dictates the omnipresence of the possibility for democratic collective and individual action.

III. Beyond Active/Passive: A Politics of Silence

To affirm democracy in the uncanny dimension of its ordinariness is also to seek to problematise passivity as exclusively a negative or non-manifestation of the demos. The binary of active/passive haunts political thought. Many thinkers, Wolin included, find in it a reason to lament the condition of the demos in late-modern democracies. According to this logic, citizens are the passive consumers of the political product sold to them through media, abstaining from active participation in the issues that form and define their lives. However, to identify passivity as merely the opposite of activity is to overlook the dynamics implicit in the former and to obscure its multiple connections with the latter.

In his recent work on politics, aesthetics and art Rancière seems to be aware of these connections. He suggests that being a spectator does not necessarily entail a passive condition that must be transformed into activity by the avant-garde artists or the political radical. Rather, it can be confirmatory or transformative of the given distribution of positions. As he says, the spectator also acts: observes, selects, compares, interprets, links, composes.¹⁹ Recognition of this action in passivity helps us to abandon, or at least re-examine, the assumption that today citizens are simply and only sunk into a condition of passivity which must be understood as apathy and denial.

Also pertinent here is Deleuze's appropriation of what he calls contraction or *passive synthesis* as a supportive and constitutive element of thought together with active syntheses of memory and understanding. This reveals how repetition and passivity participate in our thinking and indeed are indispensable to it.²⁰ To seek to elevate a body from the state of a mere

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 13.

²⁰ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 71.

spectator of democracy to the state of a democratic actor is not only to neglect the multilayered operations in which she is already engaged when she contemplates; it is also to presuppose her as ignorant and incapable of acting. In other words, it is to predetermine the attributes and abilities appropriate to the democratic citizen and, *a priori*, to discredit some individuals for their lack of potentiality as democratic subjects. It is to predetermine who can carry a democratic ethos and who cannot.

We saw in Chapter Two the problematic relationship of theory to practice in political theory. We saw how theory is traditionally equated with speculation, separate from and in contrast to practice. Philosophy had to wait for Nietzsche to give to it *vis contemplativa* and *vis theoretika* as inseparable and allied to a third element - creativity, that disturbs this binary. Creativity, as Nietzsche understood, is not a conscious activity that shapes and determines thought. It is already there synthesising or connecting operations in a way that Deleuze describes as repetition and passive synthesis. Theory, then, is not the opposite of practice: it is a form of action that seeks to disturb the rationalising forces embedded in our perceptions of the political life and subject which tend to rely on secure and convenient constructions. The hubris of theory is that it indulges in nothing else but its own self-image or worse as Louis Althusser, Rancière's ex-mentor, puts it, its own self-conception.²¹ To value theory over practice (or the opposite) is to value activity over passivity and thus to fail to recognise how these oppositions obscure the fact that to be passive or active is merely to embrace and adopt different intensities of expression according to the circumstances. Activity and passivity are variations in intensity.

Recognition of the falsity of the passivity/activity binary frees us to appreciate concepts or tactics that deserve close attention but which political discourse frequently obscures. Such is the case with silence. In popular and academic discourse silence is often considered synonymous with apathy and passivity. This view is intensified by the celebration of language and verbal articulation which takes place within social science as part of the 'linguistic turn'. Political thinkers emphasise voice while condemning silence as a sign

²¹ Louis Althusser, "The transformation of philosophy", in Louis Althusser and Gregory Elliot, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 1990), 258.

of ignorance or/ and indifference. For theorists of discourse ethics such as Habermas, speech is a prerequisite for political participation, the royal road to empowerment and emancipation. We have seen how Young relies on speech and specific acts of communication to advance her vision of radical democracy. However, as Norval drawing on Cavell affirms, silence has many modalities. We should investigate each of them if we are to understand the political capacity of silence.²²

The modality of silence here endorsed is not the outcome of censorship or exclusion. It is not to be perceived as disempowerment. Rather, I wish to affirm silence in its positivity, as a tactic, a choice, a means to communicate a meaning and hence as a political possibility,²³ disturbing the prevailing assumption that only visibility and voice can constitute freedom and political participation.²⁴ I want to argue for the political power of silence, when this is a choice or even when it is perceived as such given the context in which it is encountered. It is not that silence *per se* is political. But it can be politicised. In specific contexts and under specific circumstances it can be a means of transmitting a political message by subjects that are not necessarily disempowered, inaudible or invisible, neither apathetic nor ignorant, but who choose to be silent because they perceive their refusal to speak as a means to express disapproval or disavowal of a political decision made for them by others. It is the choice of those who believe not that they have nothing to say, but that there are no ears to listen to what they have to say.²⁵

Silence functions both constitutively and disruptively. It can be the element that unites a demos around a fugitive commonality, thus constituting it as political subject. It can be the tactic that intervenes into a political process

²² Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 210, n. 66.

²³ The notion of tactic here is the one that Michel de Certeau attributes to the concept, that is, the logic of action that does not have a proper place and hence depends on time, it is always related to the circumstances and the opportunities at hand, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

²⁴ For an analysis of the relationship between freedom and silence from a Foucauldian perspective see Wendy Brown, "Freedom's silences" in her *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 83-97.

²⁵ Here I have on mind the movement "I demonstrate my silence in Herakleion", a local movement in a Greek city where participants choose to organise silent demonstrations that do not disrupt the normal city life. They use two handmade red bands to symbolically close their mouths, using then their bodies rather than their voices to communicate their political demands.

such as an election procedure to question it. Hence its subversive power. According to Thoreau, silence alone is worthy to be heard.²⁶ But by merely juxtaposing it with voice we not only risk the chance of grasping its force as a shelter from power and thus as a form of resistance, as Foucault understands it;²⁷ we also risk overlooking the multiple ways and the various layers across which silence functions and constitutes the collective - memory, consciousness or identity. Silence is not only a form of disapproval of a government by the citizens who do not attend the election procedures. It can also be a form of approval of those who make noise by, for example, barracking a politician, a paradoxical voice that despite never being raised still functions at the visceral register and forms one's political identity.

The myth of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens is well-known: the hero asks his crew to plug their ears with wax and bind him to the mast so that he could be exposed to and indulge in their song, yet not succumb to it. In his subversive reading of the myth Kafka sees Odysseus as the stubborn and over-self-confident hero who overlooks common beliefs and dares to expose himself to the allure of the Sirens. He writes: "the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing never happened, it is still conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never."²⁸ In the Kafka's reading of the myth, the central figure is no longer Odysseus but the Sirens who decide not to give their voice and thus to surprise their opponent by doing the unexpected, the unpredictable. It is not their weakness that urges them to do so, but their intention to explicate a different yet powerful mode of action. The Sirens used their silence to startle their enemy: there is an appealing, almost magnetic quality in silence.

I use this illustration here to suggest that alternative ways of democratic action are always available to us and that they do not need to be demonstrated with noise or voice. The important thing, I believe, is to be ready to take advantage of the conditions, to exploit and channel them to our

²⁶ Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal* (Toronto: Dover Publications Inc., 1962), 518.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 101.

²⁸ Franz Kafka, "The silence of the sirens", in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 430-431.

benefit. I concur with Wolin that democrats need a new conception of revolution and I propose silence as offering a potential for this conception: a mute revolution of all those who are tired of the words, promises and fake commitments to which they are exposed. These figures, blamed as apathetic or ignorant, choose speechlessness not out of resignation but because they understand the failure of language to transmit their claims and they seek an alternative way to achieve it. In choosing silence over voice or noise, democrats don't choose to turn their back to their challengers; rather they choose to provoke them in the most disturbing and irritating way, like the student provokes the teacher when the latter demands an explanation that never comes. The receivers of silence who interpret it as a sign of resignation and weakness and thus as favouring them, experience even more surprisingly the shock tactics of silence: it is a powerful weapon that cannot be fought, since there is nothing to fight. Silence as choice is the result of previous experiences and thoughts which have been accumulated and participate in this ear-piercingly quiet outburst. And the wax is not enough to help one avoid it.

IV. Interlude

The democratic vision developed in this chapter is based on the disturbance of binaries that are considered as definitive for theorising democratic ways of thought and experience. However, as has already been made clear, there is no way of completely escaping or avoiding them for our world is already dualistically organised. It is by interfering in these binaries that we can affirm other possibilities available to us for acting or making sense of the world that surrounds us. Hence, in refusing to confine democracy within the boundaries of an event narrowly defined we appreciate the multiple forms democracy can take, the diverse bodies, forces and networks that take part in its production and the many ways in which democratic thinking can be communicated. Such a denial signifies also the appreciation of the work that we do on ourselves (both as individuals and as collectivities) in what precedes that event and remains a part of it. This is not to argue that

democracy is a slow-paced process, but rather that it is a more wide and open-ended occurrence than is appreciated by thinkers who confine it to a moment. Democracy is not the disruption or eruption of a linear-affirmed political time but a long-lasting correspondence between already established structures and strategies and emerging flows and tactics that carry the possibility of transforming the former without necessarily aspiring to its destruction or transgression. The return to *the* police order is not a dead end.

Democracy as embraced in this chapter is inherently and irreducibly agonistic. Chapter Four discussed how the concept of *agon* inspires different democratic thinkers in different ways to articulate democratic visions where contestation is perceived as an inextricable part of the political field. Where for Mouffe it is the pluralism of values that renders democracy agonistic, for Connolly it is the Nietzschean formulation of the idea of the pathos of distance between adversaries that inscribes the agonistic nature of democracy.²⁹ Other thinkers of agonism have contributed to the formation of this distinct yet diverse strand of democratic thought: Honig with her Arendtian understanding of the *agon*; Coles with his assertion of coalition politics in their agonistic and agonising dimension. For all of them, conflict, antagonism and disagreement are inevitable and indeed celebrated elements of democratic politics.

In this chapter I have argued that the agonistic affirmation of democracy stems from the embrace of its shifting and multifarious nature. Democracy is itself an *agon* because it is an ongoing process of creating, grasping and capitalising on possibilities for action in conditions of fluidity, plurality and ambiguity. Thus understood, democracy is necessarily agonistic for it is a constant call for awareness of the specificity of the circumstances and for receptivity to the possibilities for interference they carry; at the same time it is a call to overcome or at least resist established views, identifications and patterns of acting and thinking, while adopting a more affirmative stance towards the current. Deleuze says that the new is the current;³⁰ democracy is a ceaseless unfolding of potential new multiplicities which demand our

²⁹ Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 99-100; Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, xxvi.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "What is a dispositif?", in Timothy J. Armstrong (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatshead, 1992), 164.

activation at the opportune time. It is agonistic from another aspect, as well: its openness results in instability and fragility. Democracy is something to always strive for.

Democracy is too complex to be understood if grasped only as rupture. It needs also to be perceived as maintenance and not just as new beginnings but also as preparation, popular receptivity and orientation.³¹ That is, without renouncing the importance of viewing democracy as an eruptive moment, it is suggested here that it would be more productive to place this eruption in a democratic context that provides us with ever-present possibilities for acting and in fact nourishes them; such actions are not necessarily extra-ordinary in the sense of carrying the dynamic of radical innovation, but can be part of our repeated and crystallised modes of action, without this depriving them of their quality of variation. As Heidegger puts it, the situation in every case of action is different: “the circumstances, the givens, the times and the people vary and so does the meaning of the action itself”.³² To act ordinarily is necessarily to act with variations. Democratic action, that is acting and thinking, is invariably unfolded into diverse ways and dimensions; it is the occasion in which this unfolding takes place that defines its specific traits. Today, more than ever, to act or think democratically demands to comport with the heterogenous circumstances one encounters, to be affirmative toward them, but also to be disposed to exploit them in favour of an expansion of what counts as democratic. It demands, in other words, to have a democratic ethos, a democratic disposition that despite being there and directing this comportment toward the specificity of the situation, is also too fluid to be described simply through the enumeration of particular traits. The exploration of the nature and the distinctiveness of this democratic ethos is the focus of the last section of the chapter.

³¹ Honig, *Emergency Politics*, xvii.

³² Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 101.

V. For an Ethos of Democracy: Dwelling in the Moment and *Metis*

The key argument of this thesis is that a democratic vision needs to be sustained by and infused with an ethos if it is to be attractive, desirable and inspiring: codes and institutions alone cannot mobilise individuals politically. The previous chapters explored how ethos appears across a spectrum of democratic political thought. To make the case for the omnipresence of ethos in democratic thought and experience is not to suggest that politics is simply derivative of ethical choices and positions. Rather, it has been argued that politics entails a formation of viewpoints, negotiations and responses regarding ethical issues. To open up 'ethos' is to intensify awareness of the role played by ontological assumptions in the constitution of our political choices, not in terms of determining them, but of prefiguring and affecting them. Thus Chapter Four considered how William Connolly, among others, affirms the relationship between ontological and political presumptions not in terms of efficient causality, but in terms of a mutual imbrication such that ontologies are ubiquitous in political life. Stephen K. White has coined the term "weak ontologies", in contrast to "strong" ones, which he attributes to our fundamental yet contestable interpretations of the existential realities and ontological figures that shape the ways we place and understand ourselves in the world and hence our ethical-political life.³³

Ethos is approached here as inhabited by binaries. As Chapter One shows, from tradition to modernity ethos oscillates between two poles: a collective account that refers to the common traits, beliefs and customs shared by a community, nation or group; an individual account being understood as the character, the general stand or attitude one develops and demonstrates throughout his life. In many cases, for example in the work of Plato, ethos connotes morality and is connected to obedience to a code of rules. However, as we also saw in Chapter One, Foucault opened up the interplay between the public and the private components of ethos and showed how ethical practices may function as catalysts to democracy. It was also argued that Heidegger provides us with a challenging and specifically

³³ Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

political account of ethos and, in particular, recognised the importance for it of time. In this section we will revisit the Heideggerian account of ethos and the attention it gives to the specificity of the moment. In doing so we will make the case for an elaborated account of ethos adequate to the vision of kaleidoscopic democracy embraced in the present chapter.

To begin with, an ethos that corresponds to the vision of the agonistic multifarious democracy is best perceived as a plurality and thus as *ethea*. It is a multiplicity in that it is not limited to a single disposition but instead consists of a variety of dispositions, without ever being reduced or confined to them. That is, a democratic ethos is continuously in the process of reconsideration, reformulation and expansion without taking a definitive form or possessing a final content. This is due to the flux characterising democracy itself: the constant emergence of possibilities for action that inform it, render democracy an open-ended process. Democratic subjects and ways of thinking and acting are created relentlessly, indeed pressingly, either seemingly *ex nihilo* in unforeseen places and times or as the result of reactivation of previous experiences, injuries, grievances or even traumas. But what appears to an outside observer as the emergence of a new identification is in fact the result of a long established process that bursts forth under certain (un)favourable circumstances. Such is the case, for example, with the “Arab spring” and the popular revolts in Egypt and elsewhere in 2011: what to the external spectator appears as a sudden event, for the Egyptian protestor is the result of accumulated grievances, experiences and processes of (dis)identification. It may well be the result of long periods of silenced unease and condemnation of governmental decisions and actions. In other words “ordinary” events that have forged her political ethos, that is her comportment towards the negotiations over public goods in the context of the political communities to which she belongs.

To make the image of democratic ethos discussed here even more explicit, it is necessary to clarify that such an ethos is not something one possesses. Rather than a property one owns, it is something to which one can at best establish a proximity. This proximity allows room for experimentation and further creation: it is a relation under constant revision, in diverse spaces and occasions. A democratic ethos does not belong to

either the individual or the community. Indeed, it cannot be perceived in terms of property, for this would entail overlooking the fluidity, plasticity and openness to transformations which dictate the specificity of democracy and democratic ethos discussed here. An ethos that claims to be democratic is better grasped as the interplay between individual and collective processes of subjectification, on the one hand, and moments of negotiation and reconfiguration of what are perceived as common goods, on the other. A democratic ethos is always in the process of becoming, that is of mutation, of creative alteration and of transgression of boundaries that fabricate new capacities. It is through this interplay that a democratic ethos functions simultaneously as the channel of transmission of differentiations and as the plane of performance of the dynamics of pluralism.

The type of proximity relation we establish with ethos entails that our sensibilities exist by virtue of their production - they become meaningful and significant only as long as they are explicated and performed. To make this claim even stronger, perhaps it is useful to paraphrase Deleuze and his comment on Foucault's perception of the subject: there never "remains" anything to a democratic ethos, it is to be created on each occasion, like a focal point of resistance³⁴ to established codes of conduct such as those thematised by Rawls, to strong commitments to, and identifications with, a single harmonious community, as suggested by Taylor, and to absolute forms of the democratic subject as embraced by Young. Here lies the pertinence of Foucault's elaboration of the idea of "work on the self" when the issue of a democratic ethos is at stake. This idea is perfectly elaborated by Connolly in his work on democratic ethos with respect to achieving a richer understanding of one's own ethical sources.

The role of circumstances is not only crucial here but decisive, hence the relevance of Heidegger to the discussion. Heidegger alerts us to another binary that inhabits ethos, that of space/time. As we saw in Chapter One, Heidegger succeeds in discussing ethos not only in both its collective and individual components but also, and most importantly, in its temporal dimension. He helps us to shift from the archaic understanding of ethos as *topos*, as abode, to ethos as the way one places oneself in relation to others.

³⁴ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 105.

Since the occasion proves important for the formulation of a democratic ethos, it is worth revisiting Heidegger and more specifically his attention to the moment of action.

As already suggested, Heidegger utilises *kairos*, the proper time, to establish a connection between the specificity of action and the more general pattern of conduct one exhibits, a conduct that he affirms as always related to the shared traits of the community. Moreover, he affirms the subject as being thrown-in-the-world and therefore as always and already with others. The purpose of revisiting his theses here is twofold: first, to blur the concept of “being-with-one-another” in order to offer an understanding of the community that is more pertinent to the democratic vision espoused here; and second, to re-examine Heidegger’s reliance on *phronesis* as the virtue that informs action at the appropriate time. We will here seek to introduce another intellectual virtue that is long neglected but which seems to be germane to the democratic ethos envisioned in the thesis. Through these interventions it is possible to approach and honour the interplay between individual comportment and shared sensibilities, that is the terrain where a democratic ethos flourishes and functions. To attend to this interplay is to seek to politicise dispositions, sentiments and worries that in the light of specific occasions come to the surface and participate in the construction of collective democratic subjectivities. It is also to accept the mediating role played by preliminary commonalities, such as language, in the social and intersubjective constitutions of our dispositions and sensibilities and hence to the fact that they are configured, activated or re-energised through multiple and complex intersections between experiences, events and relations.

Heidegger perceives the subject as thrown in a community that participates in the shaping of its dispositions. However, and despite the fact that his approach is pertinent because he abstains from explicitly connecting the community with individuals’ character, Heidegger’s conception of community needs to be re-formulated if it is to serve the specific demands of democracy. What is rejected here is not the idea of the existence of already established commonalities and the ways these inform our commitments, but rather the Heideggerian account of community as a distinct and particular entity defined by a destiny. Such a view of community hinders significantly, I

believe, the possibilities for democratic action, for it accepts as pre-established the interconnection between the individual and the collective, restricting thus the former as a creative actor. Moreover, to accept a community as characterised by a destiny is to overlook the transformative potentiality that is carried by powers that a community cannot control, such as environmental changes or even disasters. At the very end, the focus on “a community” forecloses the internal dynamism that characterises any collectivity and which renders it already plural.

It is suggested, instead, that attention should be shifted from “community” to collectivities, then: from strictly or loosely defined entities with determinate shared attributes to shifting and negotiable points of convergence which form the starting points for our actions and make us join diverse others in pursuing common ends. Such commonalities can be understood as open *loci* of contestation and ambivalence which nonetheless allow space for the formation of fugitive alliances based on shared grievances, demands and discontents. As Rancière observes, such starting points, but also intersections and junctions, are everywhere; in each case the important thing is which point we choose to privilege in order to develop our commitments and actions.³⁵

Another problematic aspect of Heidegger, especially in relation to conceptions of the possibilities for democratic action, is his discussion of subjectivity and in particular his affirmation of authentic Being as an ultimate goal. The more open-ended democratic subject taken on here demands an approach that does not seek to confine the subject and its motivations for action either in too tight collective entities or as aiming at predetermined goals. Such an approach carries with it an evaluative content that cancels the equalising dynamics proper to a democratic approach. Heidegger is correct not to seek to overlook the fact that individuals are always already *miteinander*, with and among others, but rather than understanding this happening in the context of a concrete community with a specific destiny we can approach his idea of thrownness from a different angle: that of becoming-other.

³⁵ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 17.

The argument here draws on Deleuze's insights and elaborations of Foucault's conception of the process of subjectification. It suggests that an understanding of the subject as becoming may assist us in appreciating the processes of emergence of commonalities and thus in honouring the interplay between the individual and the collective components of ethos. The first section of Chapter One discussed Foucault's specific approach to ethics as exactly the relation one develops with oneself through techniques of self-cultivation or work on the self. Deleuze observes that this process of subjectification, of creating the self, evolves as a process of folding, that is of directing power towards the inner, that which is inside, but still it is always related to what lies outside the subject; self-development is always already related to an exteriority that nonetheless is the precondition of the subject's existence: subjectivity is already collective and plural. In his collaborative work with Guattari, Deleuze revisits the idea of subjectification, of the relation to oneself, and enriches his understanding of it by way of considering it a creative, even artistic, process, as a becoming that takes place between multiplicities.³⁶ Thus affirmed, becoming allows room for mutations, that is for "other contemporaneous possibilities".³⁷ Therefore becoming is to be always understood as becoming-different, as becoming-other, in terms not of a produced outcome but of a process of continuous flows that produce infinite outcomes. That said, the subject is never fixed and given but instead is open to constant and heterogenous movements, speeds and intensities. As Deleuze puts it elsewhere, "there are no more subjects but dynamic individuations [...] which constitute collective assemblages". The subject is already collective and plural.³⁸

This shift from being to becoming, from belonging to a community to being constituted as collectivity, enables us to assert both the democratic subject and the democratic community not as entities but as open-ended processes which are formed and regenerated through complex interconnections between experiences, values that are perceived as established, and inventive practices. In other words, it enables us to come closer towards

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 262-263.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 301.

³⁸ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 93.

appreciating the interplay between the individual and collective poles, where the latter component is already present and active in the former. This is not to underestimate Heidegger's concern with otherness and difference, that is his understanding of Dasein as being towards otherness. We saw in Chapter One how he finds that homecoming is always the return to what remains uncanny. This is why Heidegger proves important for the argument drawn here.

The second purpose of revisiting Heidegger is to re-examine his reliance on the concept of *phronesis* as the virtue that informs one's comportment in the world, one's ethos and to open onto an alternative virtue that is more appropriate for the complexities and openings of democratic thinking and acting. As already discussed in Chapter One, Heidegger's attendance to *kairos*, to the appropriate time of action, makes his work especially pertinent to the argument of the thesis. For this move leads him to elaborate a concept of ethos that oscillates between the specific time of action and one's more general, permanent behavioural conduct as informed by the traits of the community in which one is thrown. I have already discussed in Chapter One the way in which the Aristotelian/Heideggerian conception of *phronesis*, informed as it is by *episteme*, entails a stability and fixity that cut against the conception of democracy embraced here. Late modern democracy *demand*s from the democratic subject readiness to undertake action, to capitalise upon the circumstances and to be inventive and creative so that she can grasp the opportunity to enter the democratic *agon* joining unforeseen adversaries. It *demand*s from her even a readiness to remain silent if this will give her superiority against those who would threaten democracy, be that a corporation (as in Wolin's analysis), a demonising assemblage (as Connolly might put it) or political philosophy itself (which is Rancière's enemy). This is why I think that *metis* is relevant to my argument and to late modern democracy.

Metis is pertinent to the work undertaken here first of all because, like ethos itself, it is a multiplicity; it consists of but is not confined to the mental attitudes of the individual who values and appreciates the circumstances and takes action accordingly. For the ancient Greeks *metis* is a diverse form of intelligence operating on many different levels and domains, a type of

thought or a way of knowing.³⁹ It is multidimensional, since it refers to the behaviour that is informed by vigilance, versatility and even deception and it thus becomes pertinent to transient and shifting occasions. It was because of its polymorphism, diversity and mutability that it was scorned by the rigorous philosophers of the 4th century B.C. As one scholar observes, it was the “concerns of abstraction, propositional knowledge, logocentric formulation and objective bases of knowledge” that drove thinkers towards disdaining or merely overlooking *metis*, since it “cannot be formulated in terms of a definition or essence and because its ‘objects’ are changing, ambiguous situations that are not amenable to rigorous logical demonstration”.⁴⁰ There is, then, an oxymoron with regard to *metis*, for although it is a form of intelligence, it is too protean and floating to be the object of analysis and explanation by reason.

For the ancient Greeks, the persona par excellence of *metis* is Odysseus, the ingenious hero of the Homeric epics. However, *metis* is also associated with the sophist, who is expected to demonstrate this quality as he displays his words “in many coils”: the sophist is a master at bending and interweaving *logoi*, a man who knows “how to turn an argument against the adversary who used it in the first place”.⁴¹ Plato condemned sophists for this use of words and he criticised them for being deceptive and opportunistic. However, it is exactly these traits that render *metis* pertinent to democracy and to the democratic ethos embraced here. This is so because *metis* appears to be pertinent to the temporal specificity of the occasion of the *agon*, its fraught and unstable time, that is the shifting and polymorphic, ambiguous terrain where the weak party has a chance at victory, a way to take advantage of the peculiarity of the circumstances. Connolly is correct to raise the importance of critical responsiveness in the occasion of the *agon*. However, to be a successful/ responsive democrat, that is, one attuned to the demands of the specific occasion, one needs to be ready to grasp the fleeting opportunity for action that arises in unpredictable places and under

³⁹ Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, 3.

⁴⁰ Lisa Ann Raphals, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3.

⁴¹ Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, 42.

unforeseen circumstances. *Metis* is a way to approach an adversary, that incorporates the ability both to attach and detach oneself and therefore to be able to engage in coalition with the part most likely to enable success, using the means that will bring one closer to it. To be gripped by *metis* is to be alert to this opportunity, but also to be prepared to undertake whichever task required, even to engage in trickery and deceit. However, this should not be confused with an inclination towards violence. *Metis* contrasts with force.⁴² The holder of *metis* has stronger weapons than violence.

Romand Coles has shown how democracy today more than ever takes the form of trickster politics, that is of a politics that honours the tensions between diverse constituents of the democratic game, such as grassroots initiatives and interest groups, but without getting confined to the frame of this game. For it is by honouring these tensions that the democrat contributes to the crafting of democracy and its opening to further possibilities. Coles finds this mode of democratic action to be informed by a “trickster sensibility” which allows and enables it to be “responsive, supple, and capable of fashioning new and powerful practices even as it masters the arts of much more cramped games”.⁴³ To be attentive to otherness and to be assertive of what the other brings to the field of the *agon* will often involve “an uncanny welcoming of the other, a jack rabbit-like listening, trickster malleability”, in other words “a critical engagement that is both radically receptive and agonistic, a tranfiguration that will-at the disjointed moment of the encounter-demand far more than any preparation could ever satisfy”.⁴⁴ *Metis*, with its adaptability, multidimensionality and ambiguity is closer to such a politics than *phronesis* with its more stable and fixed form. Not only does it allow one to attend to the tensions that constitute the multifarious democratic politics, but it does so while allowing space for a reactivation of previous experiences and proclivities that shape future ones. It is then a contribution not towards impulsiveness but towards seizing the moment; not towards waiting for the

⁴² See for example *Ibid.*, 5-7 and Roger Dunkle, “Nestor, Odysseus, and the metis-bie antithesis: The funeral games, Iliad 23” *Classical World* 81, no. 1, 1-17.

⁴³ Romand Coles, “Of tensions and tricksters: Grassroots democracy between theory and practice” *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 3 (2006), 559.

⁴⁴ Romand Coles, “Traditio: Feminists of color and the torn virtues of democratic engagement” *Political Theory* 29, no. 4 (Aug. 2001), 500.

“golden opportunity” but adapting to and even creating the opportunity for action: for each circumstance is unique in that it offers a possibility for action. It is only that some occasions are more intense than others and they offer a chance for results with greater impact.

This temporality is important when taking on the issue of a democratic ethos, but should not be conflated with momentariness in terms of a fugitive time. Occasions offer possibilities for action, that is for thinking and for acting, but this action does not merely conform with the context of the occasion, for it is not simply and strictly defined by it. Crucial to the formation of this action is the role of previous actions and hence dispositions, experiences and performances that are accumulated and which all participate and contribute to our performance in the occasion we encounter. A democratic ethos, then, is our dwelling in the occasion, a temporal dwelling not in a Hegelian and thus teleological sense, but in an open and indeed opening mode of relating to the occasion. It is a dwelling in the inter-time between one’s individual existence and the collective worlds one inhabits. A democratic ethos is an ethic attuned to the moment which nevertheless goes beyond it, for its formation depends on practices, perceptions and tactics already performed and experienced. Today’s agonists of democracy do not have the luxury of ease. They need to plan their action promptly to respond to their challengers aptly and skillfully. To employ *metis* is to be artful enough to confute adversaries by taking advantage of the circumstances of the occasion.

The idea of a democratic ethos, enriched with the help of *metis* and understood as congruent with the specificity and demand of the moment resembles Derrida’s concept of a “democracy to come”. Although present in his political philosophy as early as 1989, it is in his late work that Derrida provides the most well-articulated and informed explanation of this concept. For as he confesses, he feels regret at having used and abused the expression “democracy to come” in his early work.⁴⁵ Indeterminacy for Derrida is inherent to democracy, for it is inscribed by freedom which lies at the centre of democracy; an indetermination even more striking, that is more

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 73.

radical, originary or primitive than freedom or license to do as one pleases.⁴⁶ Democracy, says Derrida, is characterised by openness, by lack of a proper meaning, thus it is defined only by turns, tropes, tropism: there is no such thing as authentic democracy, democratic paradigm or democratic ideal.⁴⁷ This is what brings Derrida to affirm democracy as something to come, as a promise, neither in the Kantian sense of a regulative idea, nor in the aspect of a distanced future, but as “the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now”.⁴⁸ It is this structure of promise, this perception of here and now (*hic et nunc*) that renders the concept of “to-come” pertinent to the idea of a democratic ethos as suggested here.

A democratic ethos is necessarily one to-come, in the sense that it always must remain open to further formulations and expansions, while still remaining pertinent to the here and now, if it is to be responsive to the demands of an encounter, an other, an event. Like Derrida’s democracy to-come, a democratic ethos has no definitive arrival point neither shape nor essence, for it is subject to the circumstances of the *agon* in the context of which it arises. Rather than being an ultimate target for the democrat, it is open to becoming and thus to the alter. This is not only a virtue for democratic ethos, it is at the same time its limitation, for this openness renders it fragile, unstable and hence vulnerable to destruction, since it welcomes critique, contestation and challenge. In contrast to what Rancière fears, ethos does not have to be connected with domestication and thus be excluded from our discussions on democracy; indeed, a democratic ethos can be the force that informs the democratic *agon*, disturbing and provoking the established and the regular, for the sake of a more expanding, more pluralistic democracy.

In this chapter I argued for the importance of the ethotic dimension of democracy and I suggested ways to overcome the limits of theories of ethos which I discussed in the previous chapter, namely the over-emphasis on either its private or its public component. I did so by attending to an agonistic

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 86.

democratic vision; by focusing on the specificity of the democratic moment; and by introducing the virtue *metis*.

Like Connolly and Mouffe, I also argued that democracy is an *agon*; I affirm it as such because I see it as having a shifting and multifarious nature and therefore as being an ongoing process of creating and utilising possibilities for democratic action. I believe that this trait entails a constant call for awareness so that opportunities for democratic action are capitalised upon. This is where I find Wolin and Rancière pertinent to my argument, since their vision of democracy in its disruptive and existential dimensions draws our attention to the moment of democratic enactment. However, at the same time I problematised their exclusive understanding of democracy as the extra-ordinary occurrence that erupts as the moment of disturbance of the ordinary sequence of political life. Instead, I argued that it would be more productive to affirm democracy as oscillating between these two poles and I drew on Deleuze to elaborate the binary ordinary/extra-ordinary, as well as the concept of the event; I attend to the latter as a mutation of intensities and therefore I affirm it as already placed in the context of the ordinary.

I also took on another binary, the passivity/activity one, and I problematised its impact on our understanding of the possibilities and opportunities for democratic action. I demonstrated how this binary can be disturbed by attending to silence as a possible form of democratic action, so as to emphasise that the important thing for democrats in late modernity is to be ready to undertake every action that would give them advantage in the field of the democratic *agon*.

It is my attention to the importance of the occasion and the need to comport with the heterogenous circumstances one encounters, that is, to be affirmative toward them, but also to be disposed to exploit them, that forms my understanding of ethos. I specifically argued that a democratic disposition that corresponds to the vision of the agonistic multifarious democracy is best perceived as a plurality; a democratic ethos is continuously in the process of reconsideration, reformulation and expansion without taking a definitive form or possessing a final content. Drawing on my discussion of Heidegger in Chapter One, I explained how such an ethos needs to be informed by *metis*,

that is by the ability both to attach and detach oneself and therefore to be able to engage in diverse coalitions.

Following Derrida, I concluded that thus understood, a democratic ethos is necessarily one to-come, since that despite being attuned to the current conditions, it nonetheless remains open to future mutations. A democratic ethos is a democrat's comportment towards the moment, a temporal dwelling that is fugitive and transformable.



Conclusion

The central argument of the thesis is that there is an ethotic dimension in democracy which deserves the attention of political theorists. This ethos is a democrat's comportment towards the circumstances she encounters, her way of dwelling an occasion temporally. Such an ethos oscillates between the private and the public and it is this fluidity which characterises it that allows space for the tactical dimension of democracy. The latter is connected to the ethical sensibilities one develops, which are exhibited at the moment of the democratic *agon*. It is also connected to the attitude one deploys towards the circumstances, which she needs to exploit and render beneficial to her endeavours in the field of the *agon*. *Metis*, the ancient Greek concept for this ability, is pertinent here: a democratic ethos must be informed by it, if it is to fulfill its role as fugitive yet always relevant.

In revisiting various accounts of democracy, and scrutinising how the concept of ethos arises within them, we saw that the term oscillates between different meanings, from a personal ethic to the collective traits of a community. We saw, for example, how Plato connects ethos to morality and thus discusses it in its private component, by attending to it as the personal attribute of the politically incapable citizen. Hegel, on the other hand, treats ethos in its public component, since he affirms it as a collective ethical life, as the set of rules and customs that inform and shape individuals' behaviours and decisions. At the same time, the concept also refers to the abode and it thus carries a connotation of domestication, an archaic idea that as we saw persists in the thought of Rancière. In following how this oscillation between the public and the private developed in political thought in late modernity, I showed how theorists of democracy tend to emphasise either of these two poles of ethos, the private or the public, and how this prevents them from attending to the tactical dimension of ethos. This showed the importance of developing a concept of democratic ethos adequate to this tactical dimension of democratic action, one suited to late modern democracy and able to honour the interplay between the individual and the collective components of ethos. This required breaking free of persistent binaries within political

thought, confronting them and developing a conception of ethos that moved between and beyond them.

In Chapter One the ambiguity of the concept of ethos was exposed through a consideration of the work of five different thinkers (Foucault, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Heidegger). My reading demonstrated the fluidity of the term at the same time as showing how it is ubiquitous in political theory and political life. I opened the discussion with Foucault, for he is the key thinker who brought the issue of ethos to the forefront in late modernity. I suggested that Foucault embraces an ethotic vision according to which an ethic that is formed through personal work on the self has at the same time a collective dimension that informs and is informed by one's political engagements. This problematic is anything but new; it persists in political thought from antiquity to modernity. As my discussion of Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Heidegger revealed, ethos oscillates between two components, the inner, which refers to individuals' character, and the outer, which is related to the community. I found that Heidegger, because of the connection he establishes between ethos and *kairos*, proves a beneficial source of inspiration if we are to come closer to an understanding of ethos in its temporal and experiential dimensions. However, as I suggested at the end of the chapter, Heidegger's findings need further elaboration if they are to be compatible with late modern democracy. I suggested that although one can utilise Heidegger's formulation of ethos, at the same time one needs to infuse it with an intellectual virtue, that is *metis*, that will appeal to the demands of the specific democratic vision embraced in the thesis. Foucault thus proved doubly important for my discussion since he not only attends to both components of ethos by way of bridging them, but he does so while he exposes the tactical dimension of ethos. It is the blending of the key arguments of these two thinkers that helped me to establish the case I make in the thesis, mainly that a democratic ethos needs to be attuned to the specificities of the occasion and have a tactical dimension.

In Chapter Two I further explored the ambiguity of ethos by turning to democratic theory to see how ethos emerges specifically in the context of

various articulations of theorising democracy. To do so, I read democratic theory through the prism of ethos which enabled me to scrutinise the ethotic dimension of democracy. I also attended closely to the rigidity of the distinction between theory and practice that informs so much of democratic thought and argued that this binary can only be confronted if we throw in a third dimension - creativity. Overall, Chapter Two opened the discussion by attending to classical thinkers of democracy and showing that they all conceived of it as concerned with what is common to individuals in a political community, inspiring and mobilising them, and thus elevating them to citizens. That is, I found that classical democratic thinkers aspire to a kind of disposition, an ethos of democracy. Turning to modern descriptive democratic thought I showed why this is unable to grasp this question of the common, and hence the issue of ethos, because it tends to affirm democracy only as a method. I argued that the task of a theory that not only intends to deal with democracy but also aspires to be democratic itself is to allow always spaces for creation and imagination.

Chapter Three sought such a space for imagination in the work of three normative late-modern theorists of democracy: Rawls, Taylor and Young. As we saw, each seeks to respond to theorists of the 'aggregative' model of democracy by emphasising the common good inherent in democratic societies. None of these thinkers engages in an explicit discussion of ethos. However, I showed how they integrate into their thinking a conception of ethos under another name: "sense of justice", "civic patriotism" and "differentiated solidarity". These are all attempts to describe the common bond among the citizens of a modern pluralist state, the shared ethos that guides or grounds their political deliberations. In a critical discussion of these approaches I showed how each fails to provide an adequate understanding of democratic life because their conception of ethos is, ultimately, moralised withdrawing it from the strategic dimension of political action and setting it outside or above the political where it may govern actions. Furthermore, each fails to attend to the oscillation between public/private and individual/collective that characterises ethos and thus to its productive indeterminacy, a failure that leads them also to miss the tactical dimension of ethos. Rawls,

reducing democracy to a set of regulations and institutions, appeals only to the collective aspect of ethos, to a public political culture which all citizens must accept and embrace without intending to inform it. Taylor sees in the cultivation of a deep patriotic identification the necessary bond that can bring together diverse subjects in the context of a late-modern polity. However, I argued that his ethos of patriotism is pre-political, based on a process of other-understanding which does not necessarily entail political exchange. He aspires to a common purpose which he hopes that will unite the citizens of his polity, but in doing so it is as if he demands their attunement to the community's rules; hence the anti-democratic character of his patriotism. Young, who envisions a city free of oppression and in which citizens are drawn to the commons due to the common problems and worries they face, also needed an ethos to sustain her vision. Her ethos of differentiated solidarity proved to be too fixed and stable to respond to the demands of the democratic occasion. All three, then, conceive of democracy in too restricted a fashion and aspire to an ethos that is in fact a strong moral commitment; at the same time, they are unable to attend to the tactical, active and experiential dimension of ethos.

The theorists we turned to in Chapter Four proved much more successful in discussing the interconnections between democracy and ethos, not least because their affirmation of democracy as an *agon* enables them to affirm the shifting challenges that characterise it. In order to develop this argument, I undertook a complementary reading of the work of Mouffe and Connolly. This endeavour allowed me to expose their points of convergence and departure concluding that both fail to notice the significance of the interplay between the inner and outer dimension of a democratic ethos and this created limitations on their democratic visions since, inevitably, they end up suggesting an ideal in the place of the one they seek to challenge. Their aspirations notwithstanding, neither of them manages to escape or resist the tendency to be instructive. I argued that Mouffe fails to attend to the inner component of ethos at all, whereas Connolly is more aware of the importance of this aspect of ethos, honouring also its tactical dimension. Moreover, Mouffe offers a too strict view of the ethico-political principles

pertinent to the democratic *agon* and her democratic project needs to be informed by a positive ethic as the one that informs Connolly's work. I also showed that Connolly's lack of attention to the interplay between collective and individual appearances of ethos can benefit from Mouffe's appreciation of the role of citizenship in its collective dimension, but also from Foucault's account of the enactment of ethos in the occasion of the democratic action. At this point my analysis drew attention to the importance of relating the self to the circumstances in which it finds itself and thus to the momentary dimension of democracy.

This momentary dimension is, we saw, a particular concern of the two thinkers examined in Chapter Five, Wolin and Rancière. In the context of my discussion of their diverse yet parallel democratic visions we saw the importance of their affirmation of the contingent and polemical nature of the *demos* and also of their focus on democracy as a momentary experience. I argued that Wolin's reliance on ethos proves illuminating but at the same time leaves some issues under-theorised. While he affirms the indispensability of an ethos of democracy, and explicitly refers to both its components, he fails to indicate explicit ways for developing the individual aspect of ethos. Rancière in rejecting the necessity of ethos, is blinded to its individual aspect but succeeds in alerting us to the dangers that the embrace of too strong a collective ethos otherwise obscures. The discussion in this chapter thus helped to make clearer the fluidity and ambiguity of ethos and to set up the framework for the further, positive, development of the argument in the final chapter of the thesis.

In Chapter Six, then, I tried to show ways of transcending the limits of theories of ethos. This required some more focused discussion of the binary oppositions that persistently structure democratic theorising. I argued that by attending to the tensions between the poles of such binaries, as this thesis has done in its consideration of the dual constituents of ethos, political theorists can find room and resources for creative and imaginative democratic thinking. For instance I tried to disturb the binaries of passivity/activity, by suggesting an alternative way of democratic acting - silence. In

this chapter I also developed an account of agonistic democracy emerging from constant awareness of the availability of opportunities for action. It is my conviction that democracy more than anything else needs committed democrats, who are ready for action and are alert to the opportunities for action offered in unforeseen spaces and times. This is why I suggested that a democratic ethos needs to be informed by an intellectual virtue such as *metis*. Rather than an abode, in topological terms, ethos can be approached as a chronological *topos*, as a mode of relating the self with the moment of democratic action and thus as an impermanent **dwelling**.

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