

AMBIGUOUS IDEALS AND PROBLEMATIC OUTCOMES: DEMOCRACY, CIVIL SOCIETY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

GÖRAN THERBORN

SUMMARY

This paper argues three main points. First, that there are inherent ambiguities in the ideal of democracy which raise intricate issues of a universal, not area-specific, character. Second, that the concept of civil society is problematic for analytical and practical purposes, and inadequate as a tool for coming to grips with many important questions of state-society, democracy-society relations. Third, that a key to the relations between the democratic ideal and democratic reality is the question of human rights and popular demands for social justice.

The first argument starts from the literal sense and ideal of democracy, as “rule by the people”, and the two basic sets of questions that derive from it: questions about the “people”, and questions about “rule.” Who are the people, where is the boundary to non-people, or to other people? Can there be more than one people in rule by the people? Where do people come from? How are the selves of self-government formed? This last question also implies that the family cannot be taken as a given value from the point of view of democracy. How do we know or determine what should be ruled? And how much can be ruled at all?

To these and related questions historical experience has given different answers, implicitly or otherwise. Democratic theory has not provided any straightforward guidelines. The popular bases of governments can take many forms, some of which are paradoxical. A recent phenomenon of Western societies, post-democratic liberalism, poses special problems for current liberal democracies.

As a normative argument against authoritarian state regimes, civil society has proved itself a useful instrument, and it may also highlight something of the basis of operating modern democracies. However, to grasp the problems of relating democratic ideals and existing democratic realities the concept of civil society is inept and inadequate.

The basic structure of current civil society discourse has three fundamental characteristics. Civil society is a normative concept, a concept of goodness, more specifically a concept for a normative opening of a social space. Secondly, it is a separating concept, separating state and society rather than focusing on the inter-relations of the two. Thirdly, civil society is a political concept, conceiving society from the angle of politics, polity, and political power.

Through its procedural normativity and its non-social, non-economic conception of human social relations, current civil society discourse tends to throw into darkness the different resources and cultures of citizens, and their conflicts of interest.

Instead, it is proposed, from the perspective of the relationships between democratic ideals and democratic realities, to look at the social production of citizens, the public sphere as a field of competition and conflict, and at the actual interactions between states, NGOs, and the media in shaping supra-state normative orders.

Lastly, the twentieth-century record of liberal democracies with regard to human rights and social justice is dismal. Democracies have proved capable of massive killings of unarmed human beings, of racist and sexist discrimination, of reproducing poverty and misery on a massive scale. These are outcomes derived from the liberal democratic capacity for the internal and global marginalisation and demonising of enemies. There is little for the better in sight, and the UNDP, UNICEF, and the World Bank now end their social reports of the world in the twentieth century on an almost apocalyptic note.

In this situation, human rights and popular rule when taken seriously may form the basis of a critical discourse, but hardly of civil society. The possible force of change will be the claims and the movements for social justice of all those currently suffering from the deficits of human rights and democracy.

Missing Questions

It is most fitting that the Pontifical Academy of the Social Sciences should have placed the set of issues and questions connected with the relations between the democratic ideal and democratic reality on its agenda. In the two previous discussions on democracy by the Academy the issue was touched upon mainly in terms of specific areas, of very recent democracies generally, and of the Third World in particular. This paper will argue three main points. First, that there are inherent ambiguities in the ideal of democracy, raising intricate issues of a universal, not area-specific, character. Second, the concept of civil society is prob-

lematic for analytical and practical purposes, and inadequate as a tool for coming to grips with many important questions of state-society, democracy-society, relations. Third, a key to the relations between the democratic ideal and democratic reality is the question of human rights and popular demands for social justice, the latter a notion hitherto virtually totally absent from the Academic deliberations on democracy, although of Academic concern in other contexts.

Unbundling Democracy

Usually democracy is treated as an institution tout court, in normative, descriptive or explanatory ways. Here we have “models of democracy”, studies of electoral and governance systems, and attempts at explaining the rise or fall of democratic institutions. These are all legitimate and important topics, although they sometimes spill over into fads treated as catch-all magic wands. But what I would like to do here is something different, namely, to treat democracy as a complex of variable institutions located in a set of historically changing, geographically unevenly distributed social issues and unevenly possibly alternatives (see further, e.g., Therborn, 1992). The starting-point, then, is neither a history of political thought nor current constitutional interpretation, but rather the open questions inherent in the logic of democracy, in any logic of “rule by the people”.

Let us start, then, from the literal sense of democracy, the literal ideal of democracy, and the two basic sets of questions that derive from it. “Democracy” means “rule of the people”, which leads to two fundamental questions: questions about the “people”, and questions about “rule.” In relation to both of these questions, and their most important sub-questions, we shall try to indicate the historical concentration of issues around them, and the current foci of conflict, debate, and alternatives. The historical backdrop is meant only to illustrate concretely the actual enactment of ambiguities inherent in the ideals of democracy.

Questions about “People”

Who are the people?

In classical and mainstream democratic theory, mainly formulated in Europe, this is a question which is largely neglected and passed by as being trivial or self-evident. The “people” was distinctive from the monarch and from the aristocracy or oligarchy, and for the rest everyone knew that the people were the free, non-dependent, adult, male, permanent inhabitants of the polity. Slaves, serfs, servants, share-croppers, crofters, paupers, children, women, and foreigners were not part of “the people”, whatever else they might have been. Whether hawkers, peddlers, small or marginal free peasants, and small craftsmen of “polluting” or lesser trades belonged to the “people” gave rise to differences of opinion.

It took a long time, two world wars, and more, before any basic consensus about who the people are in a democratic polity was established. Switzerland is often seen as a democratic pioneer, in spite of the fact that female suffrage dates from 1971 and that about one resident in seven is excluded from the people on the grounds of being a foreigner. But it was in the New Worlds of early modern European conquest and settlement that the issue of who the people are came to the forefront most strongly. Are the natives people? In many countries the prevailing answer was ‘no’ – for example in Australia until the 1960s. Slaves are obviously not people, but what about freed slaves? In a large part of the US they were not recognised as being part of the people until the end of the 1960s. Recent immigrants were another suspect category. In Argentina they were excluded en masse in the first decades of this century. Only late and gradually, in the 1960s and 1970s, was it accepted in the West that South Africa was not a liberal democracy but a racially defined oppression of one people by another.

Women, if they were white and of old immigrant stock, had it easier. New Zealand, outback Australia, and the western US were trailblazers in female political citizenship in the world from the late-nineteenth century, something achieved in Latin Europe only after World War II.

The recent waves of mass migration, in particular, have brought the question of who are the people of the country onto the front stage again. Democratic theory has usually avoided the question, What are the proper boundaries separating one people from another? Are they to be taken as given, either by “nature” – as in “natural borders” – or, more honestly, by the whims of past history. However, for a number of reasons, the doors of nations are being opened or unhinged. New national identity politics, from Canada via the Caucasus to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, are questioning the givenness of borders. New demands for citizenship are arising. And once the demands are raised, there is seldom a good answer to them.

Can There be More than One People in a Democracy?

“*E pluribus unum*”, out of many, one [people], is the official heraldic formula of the USA. It well captures the mainstream of republican and democratic thought. The people is always one. Multi-people polities are a legacy of pre-democratic empires. The Ottoman and the Mogul empires, for instance, harboured officially recognised, religiously defined communities – *millet*. The dynastic empires of Europe, such as the Romanov and the Habsburg empires, acknowledged the existence of a number of ethnic and religious communities, as well as territories, all three with their own laws and legitimate customs. The last Habsburg emperors typically addressed their subjects as “my peoples”.

From its own experience within these multinational empires, the Marxist labour movement developed the first major conceptions of democratic multinationality in the works of Otto Bauer and V.I. Lenin. The Versailles Treaty after World War I instituted the principle of collective minority rights within the framework of national self-determination.

None of these projects was a success. The League of Nations minority guarantees were never fully operative, and in the second half of the 1930s they were overtaken by the idea – pushed by Nazi Germany but by no means by that State alone – of ethnic homogenisation through transfers of populations. Austrian Social Democracy could not prevent

the nationalist division of the empire's labour movement, much less the nationalist break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire itself. There was more of a success in the early Soviet Union, which was constituted as a multinational state. In the 1920s, before Stalinist Russification, there was also a strong promotion of national cultures and languages within the USSR. But anti-Communist nationalism and separatist national self-determination were nowhere voluntarily accepted after the early recognition of Finland's independence. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the main fissures were national, and the post-Communist States all broke out along the borders of the national republics of the Union.

However, the issue of multi-popular rule, of multinational democracy has not gone away with a proliferation of nation-states and with extensive ethnic cleansing. On the contrary, almost everywhere, demands for recognised collective identities, for collective autonomy within states, are increasing. They come from indigenous peoples, from diaspora communities, and from regional cultures.

Cultural rights constitute the most long-lived objects of controversy within the category of popular rights. Freedom of religion was virtually banned in Western Europe when the tolerant Muslim rulers were driven out of the Iberian peninsula. The religious wars of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation led to what would now be called the totalitarian principle that the ruler should decide the religion of the people. The European denial of religious freedom led to the settlement of New England. The breakthrough for religious freedom in Western Europe, discreetly tolerated in the major cities of the Dutch Republic and promoted by an elite public demand during the Enlightenment, came only during the course of the nineteenth century.

Rights of recognition, with respect to group name and identity, language, education, and areas of collective custom or life-style deployment, came later than other claim rights, and are still being fought over in most parts of the world.

The lack of any other solutions than pragmatic power and self-interest driven compromises or oppression highlights again a void in democratic theory, and the complete arbitrariness of boundaries be-

tween people. The different current situations of the Kurds in Turkey and of Albanians in Kosovo, the different international rhetorical, economic, and military line-up against and for them, respectively, illustrates this arbitrariness dramatically.

Whence do People Come?

While in European political theory, and for that matter also in the countries of externally induced modernisation – challenged, threatened, and humiliated, but not conquered by European and North American powers – the people was just there, unproblematically given. In the New Worlds and in the Colonies the politically relevant people tended to have a particular origin. To the New Worlds they came, first of all, and often exclusively, by migration. Slave and indentured immigrants, and, of course, until yesterday, natives, were never part of the people. But the status of ex-slaves and of part-descendants of slaves, of ex-slaves or of natives, was uncertain and controversial. Even if people, they were at the very least undesirable and had to be replaced, or at least overwhelmed, by desirable immigrants, white and, optimally, northern European. Such ideas were common among modernist politicians and intellectuals from the mid-nineteenth century until the depression of the twentieth century in, e.g., Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba.

In the Colonial Zone, where settler-colonists were rare, the colonial rulers envisaged people coming from “civilisation”, i.e., from imperial education. Through this last a few or some of the subject masses might become “*évolués*”, that is to say developed enough to become people. To the anti-colonialist nationalists, on the other hand, the people, the nation, came from colonial rule. In principle, every intra-colonialist divide, however accidental or arbitrary, was taken as defining – although not naming – a national people and its sacred soil, be it Indian, Ivoirien, Surinamese, Eritrean, or East Timorese. The colonial divide between the elite and the masses tended to reproduce itself after independence, usually but not always (as in the colour hierarchy of Haiti, for instance) without the racist forms of the former cleavage.

In recent times, in addition, the question of the origin of the people has been actualised by new waves of migration. Are some resident immigrants more people than others? That is, do some immigrants deserve shorter periods and milder criteria of inclusion, and others forms which are longer and harsher? And if so, why? Neighbourhood (as among the Scandinavian countries), descent (as in Germany), or particular kinds of ex-imperial connection (UK, France, and other ex-colonial powers), are the differentiating criteria which are in use.

However, there is also a more general and timeless question, made more or less salient for shifting reasons. Where does the people get its capacity for self-determination from? Under what conditions can the people best create itself, see itself, its situations, and its interests? In the political sense of democracy, no people is just there and ready. Most immediately, all peoples come from childhood, along varying routes of transition. The discrediting of colonialist, racist, and other elitist conceptions of the origin of the people does not do away with the problem of *the formation of selves for self-government*. This, in turn, should lead us to the fundamental question of the social conditions under which people are produced or grow up into “people”, in the meaning of political theory. We shall have reason to return to this question below.

In the present context, however, it seems, first of all, important to point out the interdependence of democracy and the family. No serious democrat should take “the family” as a given value. Some kinds of family are supports of democracy; others subvert it. *Ceteris paribus*, we all have reasons to expect that authoritarian families breed authoritarian polities. Moreover, collectivist family systems will spawn nepotism and favouritism in public life.

Questions of Rule

The questions of rule in democracies have tended to be even more implicit and hidden than those relating to the people. But *rule* over the people has its fundamental and difficult questions in the same way as rule by the *people*.

Rule of What?

The primary question, then, of popular rule is rule of what? This “what”, in turn, may be specified in terms of two axes, of area and of extent. The area may be defined in terms of territory and/or in terms of function. The extent may be divided horizontally and vertically into range and depth.

The legitimate territory of people X, i.e., the territorial extension of the legitimate rule of people X, is always contingent and rationally arbitrary. The colonial demarcations are only the caricatures of a universal reality.

Territorially, modern rule has developed along two contradictory lines. On the one hand, the borders of sovereignty – always fuzzy in the large pre-modern states – have become clarified and reinforced. The interstitial areas, of autonomous tributaries, nomads, or outlaws, have been enclosed. The pre-modern legal complexity of territorial relations has been straightened out into simple nation-state borders. Therefore, the nation-state, or more specifically the individual state, is much stronger today than it was a hundred or eighty years ago. The line between subjects or, nowadays citizens, and non-subjects/non-citizens, has become unambiguous.

It is true, though, that the recent development of criminal violence has set new limits to the reach of the territorial state. The no-go areas of violence are also outside any rule of the people.

On the other hand, national territorial sovereignty has always been subjected to the hierarchies of inter-state and inter-capital relations. Here there is no secular tendency, other than that of towards an international institutionalisation of dependency, where the IMF and the World Bank replace the colonial consortia who ran the Ottoman and Chinese foreign debts. This is in addition to a tendency towards international normation, which is most consolidated in Europe, with its EU Court of Justice and its Council of Europe Court of Human Rights, but which also includes a number of UN conventions with variably effective forms of international monitoring. And, most recently, there is the example of the inter-American Court of Justice, stepping in when the national

(Guatemalan) authority was incapable of dealing with army-backed terrorism.

It should not be forgotten here that the issues are complicated. The clearer the territorial sovereignty, the more room for popular rule. But while the carvings of national sovereignty divide humans arbitrarily, the weight of international organisations and courts add a global or at least regional dimension. On the other hand, again, how democratic are these international bodies, particularly in comparison with national democratic institutions? Furthermore, there are different kinds of international organisations. The IMF or the World Bank are not the same thing as an international court of human rights or as the disputes panel of the World Trade Organisation.

Whereas the territory of rule has been an ethnic or national issue, the *function* of rule has been and has remained a class question. The great concern of democracy was what ordinary people would do to property and privilege if they were conceded political rights. The answer turned out to be, surprisingly little.

However, that has not led to a celebratory complacency among the privileged. Instead, a number of offensives have been launched, and with considerable success, with a view to narrowing the functions of popular rule.

Historically, there has been an evolution of the functions of state rule. In terms of effort spent on personnel and on expenditure, there are three major periods of state trajectories. The first was overwhelmingly concerned with war and reigned in all states until the late-twentieth century. Then the infrastructure of the state territory became the most important function: ports, canals, roads, bridges, railways, telegraph, mail, and the telephone network. After about 1970 citizens' welfare became the dominant function, including in the US – which was then at war in Vietnam – education, health and social services, and social security.

This long-term state tendency has not yet exhausted itself in quantitative terms. But, clearly, there are a number of measures which have been taken recently with a view to reducing the scope of public func-

tions. The most widespread is the exclusion of monetary policy from the realm of popular rule. Some countries, from Estonia to Argentina, have given up monetary policy altogether, lining up completely with the Deutschmark and the US dollar, respectively. Others, as a recent European fad, are taking their central banks out of any democratic influence. New budgetary techniques are removing social targets from the area of free political decision-making. New pensions schemes, pioneered in Chile and then exported – with the very active help of the World Bank – across Latin America and into Eastern Europe, have been set up, turning pensions from a social entitlement to a savings scheme dependent on the development of financial markets. The whole ideological programme of a “lean state” means, under democratic political conditions, making democracy “lean” and thin.

The depth of legitimate popular rule, over a territory, over social functions, has always been controversial. The balance-point between individual or collective minority rights, on the one hand, and the rights of majority rule on the other, is logically and morally as contingent and arbitrary as the border between the sovereignty of people X and people Y.

How Much Can be Ruled by All?

Human rule has always been limited by nature, by the unpredictable vicissitudes of climate and of epidemic and other unforeseeable diseases, and deaths, by distance, and by unreliable communication. The spaces left empty by the two latter were easily and frequently invaded by human forces outside the range of any given rule, by robbers, nomads, or simply locals. The message of modernity was that the future is makeable, and an important basis for it was the extension of knowledge and control, extending the possibilities of human mastery, including the ruling capacity of states.

However, one does not need to call oneself a postmodernist to be aware of the frustrations and the disillusiones of the grand modernist projects. One of the latter-day question-marks of modernity falls upon a basic assumption of democracy. Democracy, or at least the ideal of

democracy, presupposes that something significant can be popularly ruled, that popular self-government has some substantial meaning. Postmodernism raises the question: how much can be ruled at all?

Taken strongly and seriously, this means a questioning of whether territories and/or social functions can be ruled at all. "Rule" then means that there is a positive and envisaged line of connection between intention, measures, and outcome. Chaotic unpredictability or counterfinality would mean a corresponding limitation of possible rule, including possible democratic rule by the people.

However, the futility of politics is an old bugbear of reaction, alongside jeopardy and perversity (Hirschman, 1991) and should be treated with scepticism and caution. The proper limits of possible rule are simply not known. But limits there are, and democrats should take them into account.

One important parameter of the possibilities of democratic rule is the *relative size of enterprises, markets, and states*. Currently, this triangle is changing in the direction of marketisation first of all, the relative growth of markets, but also of a growth of enterprises in relation to the state.

In relation to the enterprise, the extent of marketisation refers to the dependence of the enterprise on competitive markets, something which is indicated by the size of pertinent product and capital markets in relation to the sales and the assets of a given (set of) enterprise(s). In relation to the state, marketisation may be most easily gauged by a state economy's dependence on foreign trade, but also, and more importantly, by the ratio of state resources to the relevant capital market, and by market autonomy from state regulation. The state-enterprise part of the triangle varies with the relative financial and cognitive resources of the state *vis à vis* the set of key enterprises.

Over and above mobility, extending and deepening marketisation means a generation of resources at the disposal of capital owners, of turnover, assets, and profits. The 1980s were a crucial decade in this respect. The turnover of foreign currency trading, for example, went from 1.8 times world output in 1979 to about nine times world pro-

duction in 1989, and to ten times in 1996. The 1997 merger of the Swiss Bank Corporation and the Union Bank of Switzerland created a private body of fund management in control of 920 billion dollars of assets, which is much more than the annual output of the seventh of the G7 economies, Canada, at about 578 billion in 1996, and not much less than UK GDP, around 1140 billion. The assets of the new Swiss bank exceed more than three times the GDP of Switzerland.

Over the long haul, the triangle of enterprises, markets, and states has not developed in any linear fashion. As far as the relationship of enterprises and states is concerned, there appears to have been a long term strengthening of the state, in relative terms, in monetary and managerial resources vis à vis private enterprise. This gained momentum in the nineteenth century and was expressed most directly in the demise of tax farming, private colonial companies, and the secular trend towards socialising infrastructure – transport and communication. The expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s further enhanced the role of the state. Since the 1980s, that tendency has been partly reversed by the drive towards privatisation.

Markets grew significantly in the 40-50 years before World War I, in relation both to states and to enterprises. Then there followed what we may call “a short century of the state”, which was also that of big enterprise – of “organised capitalism” and of workplace-centred industrial Communism – from 1914 to 1989-91, and the dissolution of Eastern European Communism, globally undermined at least from about 1970.

That year, world trade, at ten per cent of world output, overtook the trade shares of 1913 and 1929 of around nine per cent. The OPEC oil price hitch pushed the trade ratio up to 15% in 1975, around which it oscillated until the mid-1990s, then rising again in 1996 to 22% of world output.

Markets have grown not only in size – they have also grown in unpredictability. The major reason is the above-mentioned explosive growth of volatile financial markets. Two other factors are the strong growth in recent years of illicit markets in drugs, and the renewed tendency in many countries for the “informal” sector of the domestic market

economy to grow. In Brazil the informal economy comprises about half of the urban economically active population; in Mexico about forty per cent.

The range of democratic rule is restricted not only by markets, but also by customary authority and by a prevalence of violence. Customary authority, of chiefs, landowners, patriarchs, has declined during the course of the twentieth century, but is still a major restraint on the possibility of popular rule throughout Africa (Mamdani, 1996), in many parts of rural South Asia, and in parts of Latin America, in particular over and against indigenous populations. Massive, more or less permanent violence is containing any possibility of popular rule in major parts of Africa, in Colombia, El Salvador, and elsewhere.

However, this section should not be interpreted as a position close to the globalist “end of the nation-state” view. Many states have been remarkably successful in recent times in developing East and Southeast Asia, in combating inflation in the OECD and in Latin America, in pursuing regional inter-state organisations such as the EU, the ASSEAN, the MERCOSUR, and others.

Rule with What?

Popular rule is not magical. It is more dependent on organisational resources than on formulas. The problem is that the rule of the people is dependent upon resources coming from outside the ordinary people, i.e., from the knowledge, the practical capability, and the honesty of the organisational apparatuses of the state.

The basic paradox here is that the effectiveness of popular rule is dependent on extra-popular organisational resources.

A great many modern attempts at popular rule have foundered on the reefs of organisational ruling incapacity. Post-colonial indigenisation of the state apparatus often turned out problematic, in terms of competence, honesty, and efficacy. Experiments in “African socialism”, for instance, foundered on the lack of appropriate organisational resources for socialist rule. On the other hand, the current tendency of

staffing ministries of finance with US and World Bank-trained economists, who might be technically competent and personally non-corrupt, tends to undermine popular rule because of their arcane knowledge and their sensitivity to the tunes of international capitalism. The autonomy of the military and police apparatuses places limits to human rights and popular rule in many parts of the world.

At an organisational level there is a general problematic current tendency with regard to the resources of popular rule. That is to say, the strong post-bureaucratic, managerial conception of state organisation, derived from private corporations including the figures of corporate managers. Whatever their competence and efficiency, these are organisational conceptions formed for and in authoritarian organisations without popular accountability. Third World and former Second World governments are faced with international organisations above them which are without any popular accountability, organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank. Democracy in the sense of elective popular rule is being undermined by these new organisational constellations.

Forms of Popular Base

Many of the tricky issues of popular rule, or of democracy, may be condensed in an ascendant sequence of the possible popular bases of regimes.

The starting-point, which is widely variable, is *popular support* for the rule that is effected – something which does not necessarily require any popular input into the polity. On the whole, this is the situation of stable autocracies, such as the empires of China, Japan, the Ottomans, and the Romanovs. It is also characteristic, as far as one can tell from manifestations of regime loyalty, of many modern dictatorships, even the most cruel ones, like Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany.

The paradox is that democracies, on the other hand, are not necessarily characterised by popular support for their governments or government policies. At least two important political watersheds in recent

political history took place through an electoral minority gaining the upper hand. One example was the South African election of 1948, won by the Nationalists, with a minority of the *white* votes (non-whites were not part of the people), which started the explicitly apartheid era. Another was the British election of 1951, which opened a new, long Tory era, where the Conservative Party received less votes than the Labour Party. In both cases, it was the electoral system which was endowed with legitimacy by the political class, not the relative number of votes. More common, of course, is the politician who is elected because of one programme and then implements another when in office. The neo-liberal turn in Argentina under Carlos Menem occurred that way.

Popular legitimacy was part of the politics of the medieval Italian city republics. But it became a central and controversial principle of high politics only with the French Revolution, and it was explicitly denied by the post-Napoleonic Holy Alliance. Only with the advance of nineteenth-century European nationalism did it assert itself. While always part of the American interpretation of history, the principle of national self-determination was universally enshrined in the Wilsonian principles of the post-World War I period.

Popular representation in ruling was an ancient European demand, carried over into the Americas. It was crucial to the conflict of separation between the Thirteen North American colonies and the Crown.

In the course of the long nineteenth century, up till World War I, the principle of popular representation was established almost everywhere, in the ancient empires of Japan, China, the Ottomans, and Russia, as well as in the new empires of Britain and France.

Popular accountability, the accountability of rulers to the people, was a different matter. The monarchical tradition, whereby the monarch was answerable to God only, was still strong right up until the end of the First World War. After a short while it was then relayed by new dictatorships, all claiming some form or other of popular legitimacy. Since the end of the Second World War, “democracy”, with its institutions of popular legitimacy by elections, of popular representation by parliaments, and of popular accountability by replaceable leaders, has

been the only normative standard of government. In practice this has often been violated for one “special” reason or another.

Popular participation in ruling is more explicitly, more directly demanding. It was part of the Paris revolutionary tradition, from 1792-93, was revived in the Paris Commune of 1871, and from there was theorised into the Marxist labour movement. It materialised among the urban popular classes on the crest of revolutionary waves in the workers’ and soldiers’ councils in Russia in 1905 and 1917, and, for a few months, in Germany, in Vienna, and in Budapest in 1918-19. It evaporated into the symbolic air of the “Soviet” Union.

The global 1968 movement of radical youth voiced demands for participatory democracy. Without ever being accepted and institutionalised, more participatory democracies ensued for a while in many countries, with more and larger public demonstrations and meetings, and more active political parties and organisations, etc.

In the issue of the *efficacy of popular self-rule* our questions of people and rule come together. Given functioning democratic popular institutions, what possibilities do they have of governing effectively according to the will of the people?

In the more unstable world economy some cases of spectacularly ineffective popular rule, such as the British Labour government of 1978-79 and, for instance, in the Latin America of the 1980s the governments of Alfonsín in Argentina and Alan García in Peru, gave force to a new and important political-economic current – post-democratic liberalism. It first emerged as a conservative response to the demands for participation, in and after 1968, focusing first on “government overload” and “ungovernability”, but in the wake of the socio-economic failures of many centre and left-of-centre governments during the world economic turbulence of the late 1970s-early 1980s, conservative worries developed into an agenda of offensive.

Post-democratic Liberalism

Elected politicians are still key actors, but elections are no longer significant acts, for the time being, with regard to social and macro-

economic policy. The new configuration of mainstream political players is better denoted as being post-democratic rather than undemocratic or authoritarian. They recognise freedom of opinion, the state of law, and the indispensability of legitimacy by competitive elections. But public opinion and popular participation are irrational dangers, which have to be kept out and at bay as much as possible, by institutional enclosures and resolute shepherding, or by “leadership”.

Post-democratic liberalism is, of course, related to the elitist theory of democracy developed by Schumpeter (1943/1950: ch. XXII) as “competition for leadership”, but it is more concerned with the tasks of keeping the people at a distance than Schumpeter’s laid-back and cynical position of the 1940s, that is to say showing the idealists and the hopefuls that this is what there actually is to democracy.

We can spell out this new configuration of public actors at four levels: politics, governments, parties, and public administrations.

Inside politics there is an important shift from elected to non-elected actors and institutions, in particular with regard to monetary and economic policy-making, to non-accountable “independent” central banks or administrative agencies such as currency boards, and to finance ministers recruited from outside politics.

Inside governments there has been established an over-towering dominance of the Treasury, and within the Treasury there is an ascendancy of post-Keynesian neo-liberal economics. Against this dominance no significant countervailing power is anywhere to be found.

Inside parties a major shift of power has taken place from politicians with popular roots and representativeness in favour of slick technocrats with an overwhelmingly neo-liberal education and media-genic presenters.

In the public service a remarkable bifurcation has taken place. On the one hand, a small stratum of top managers has been created who receive vastly increased remuneration, and on the other a radically shrunk public proletariat has come into being faced with heavier and more stressing workloads, employment insecurity, and often less pay. The creation of the former stratum has been crucial in implementing drastic

reductions of, and deteriorated conditions for, the bulk of public employees, and in managing the privatisation of public services.

Any national post-democratic liberalism is sustained by the moves of financial markets and, if need be, by IMF arm-twisting.

With elections marginalised – and conventional popular protest defused into impotent protest voting for xenophobic parties, in countries such as Austria, Belgium, and France – and shared agreement and collective bargaining increasingly shunned both by governments and capital, there has risen another significant actor, side by side with the post-democratic liberal configuration. This actor is the *protest crowd*, often rallied by some rather specific vested interests attacked by the post-democratic configuration. Throughout the Third World there have been a series of “IMF riots”, beginning in Africa and the Arab world and spreading to Southeast Asia in the 1997-98. In Europe the most spectacular examples of this were the 1994 demonstrations in Italy against the pensions cuts proposed by the then Berlusconi government, and the massive strikes and demonstrations in December 1995 in France, triggered by a government proposal to abolish the right of underground train drivers to retire at the age of fifty. The twentieth century ended with a spectacular, and in the short-run surprisingly successful, protest crowd against the World Trade Organisation meeting held in Seattle in December 1999.

The problem is that protest crowds may be effective expressions of popular will, capable of bringing down unpopular governments and policies, but they are hardly instruments of effective popular rule.

Summing Up

Democracy should be seen as an enormous range of alternatives, not only in the sense of offering an infinite range of possible policies, or only in the sense of a set of variable systems of elections and of decision-making, but also in the sense of raising fundamental questions about the people and its alternatives of rule. Taking them seriously involves realising not only the multiple meanings of people and rule

but also the fact that what is popular is not always democratic and what is held to be democratic is not always popular.

We may tabulate a summary of the questions and issues touched on or implied above.

Figure 1. *Questions and Issues of "People"*

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Classical Issues</i>	<i>Current Foci</i>
Who?	Ethnic Gender Race	Migration Identity Politics
More Than One?	Multi-Ethnicity Multi-Religion	Multiculturalism Indigenous peoples Regional cultures
Whence?	Education Descent	Citizenship Civic culture Social conditions
What rights?	Rights to act Rights to claim	Social entitlements Cultural rights
Why rights?	Emancipation Instruments of power	Scope of human rights

Figure 2. *Questions and Issues of "Rule"*

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Classical Issues</i>	<i>Current Foci</i>
Of what?	Sovereignty Functions	National vs. International Social & monetary functions
How much is possible?	Knowledge Control	Big, chaotic, illicit markets Violence
With what?	State organisation	Privatisation
Rules?	Constitution Class compromise	International rules Market flexibility

Among all these issues, three seem to me more urgent than others. One concerns the best forms of multi-popular democracy, which refers to democratic arrangements for more than one people within state borders, as well as to forms of inter-state democracy which is regional, as in the EU, or global. The second has to face the question of rule of what? More concretely, the issue is how, and how strongly, to stand up against the current programmes for a leaner and meaner democracy, scaling down the proper functions of democratic rule. That is to say, the current programme of post-democratic liberalism. Thirdly, there is the most difficult question of all. How far is rule at all possible, in the face of huge, volatile, unpredictable markets, new forms of enormously profitable illicit trade in drugs, the informalisation of poor people's markets, and the endemic violence to be found in many areas? And, even more difficult, how is effective popular rule possible under these circumstances?

These are hardly times of democratic triumph. But they are, among other things, also times of claims to rights, and times of occasionally powerful popular protest. Whether these claims and protests will be able to prepare the ground for a new wave of democratisation in the world remains to be seen.

Civil Society and its Limitations.

The last years of the Cold War saw the resurgence of the old and pre-democratic concept of civil society, first as an intellectual weapon of the anti-Communist opposition in East-Central Europe, later as a companion concept to democracy, in particular in Anglo-American discussions of democracy but also more generally as a notion designating a prerequisite of a functioning democracy, or simply as a shorthand for the world of NGOs, a recent neologism (see further, Cohen and Arato, 1992; Diamond, 1997; Gellner, 1994; Habermas, 1992; Hall, 1995; Keane, 1988.).

As a normative argument against authoritarian state regimes, civil society has proved itself a useful instrument, and is currently being invoked to this effect, for instance in Egypt and in Iran. It may also

highlight something of the basis of operating modern democracies. However, to grasp the problems of relating democratic ideals and existing democratic realities the concept of civil society is inept and inadequate.

Let us first lay out the basic structure of current civil society discourse. It has three fundamental characteristics. Civil society is a normative concept, a concept of goodness. Secondly, it is a separating concept, separating state and society. Thirdly, civil society is a political concept – including 1980s anti-Communist eastern European “anti-politics” – which conceives society from the angle of politics, polity, and political power.

Civil Society as a Normative Concept

Normative concepts have a long tradition in social theory. In contemporary political theory we may distinguish at least three major functions of normative concepts.

One is normative *closure* – prohibiting, de-legitimizing certain acts. The discourse of human rights has primarily, although not exclusively, this function, de-legitimizing arbitrary violence, torture, and discrimination, for example.

Secondly, there are concepts for normative *opening* – claiming a legitimate social space, for a priori undefined or only generally and vaguely defined activities. Toleration and freedom of thought and speech have been traditional slogans of this sort. Here, too, is where civil society belongs, carrying a heavier, more pretentious political luggage than its predecessors.

Closure and opening may, of course, be seen as two sides of the same coin, and the same normative concept may be used both for opening some doors and for closing others. The point here is only that normative discourses can have different thrusts, and that current civil society discourse has the characteristic one of demanding an open social space.

Thirdly, normative concepts may designate a *direction* in which polity and society should go, or a *standard*, by which their location may be assessed. Justice is the classical concept of this kind.

Normative concepts have an important role in any discourse on matters human and social. However, there is also always a particular *risk of normativity*, which is the substitution of either hope or preaching for analysis. This risk, in turn, may be seen as a variant of a more general phenomenon – the cost of illumination. A concept is launched for elucidating something, like a spotlight. But a spotlight casts its light on some things by throwing darkness over others.

Civil society illuminates:

The democratic importance

of voluntary associations (cf. Putnam, 1993; Cohen and Rogers, 1995),
of civility,

of civic etiquette, decency (Carter, 1998; Margalit, 1996), and

of procedure and communication (Habermas, 1992).

Civil society throws into darkness:

Different resources among citizens/residents.

Interest conflicts among citizens/residents.

Different cultural impregnations of citizens/residents.

Different meanings and implications of associational membership
(cf. Rosenblum, 1998).

Political issues of substance.

The empirical structure of contemporary publics.

Civil society discourse is veiling the complex and multi-layered character of contemporary societies, including the multiple meanings, experiences, and consequences of associational pluralism, which may be not only supportive of democracy but also subversive of it, or an authoritarian safety-valve, an escape from politics, or many other things.

At the April 1998 session of the Pontifical Academy, Professor Glendon (1999: 368) expressed some telling reservations, interestingly enough, not about the concept of civil society as such but about its inter-

national application. “Lobbies and interest groups are not ‘civil society’.” Secondly, organisations “very distant from public scrutiny and democratic accountability” do not qualify for civil society. Thirdly, “‘capture’ by special interest groups” is not something that a civil society, in Glendon’s reading, brings about.

At this point it might be asked, what current democratic countries are there which are without “lobbies and interest groups”? What sense is there to conjuring away the latter, as Arato and Cohen, and Habermas do through economics, by defining civil society as society with the economy left out? In any case, this conception of civil society renders a priori impossible any investigation into the reality of actually existing democratic societies.

Secondly, civil society is a concept by which to distinguish and separate the state and society. The state stands for compulsion, usually also for hierarchy or verticality; civil society for voluntariness, horizontality. Civil society, as a rule, stands for goodness, while the state is, at best, necessary. The prevalent separation is tripartite: state (compulsion, rights system, polity, e.g. democracy), civil society (associations, discussion), private sphere (families, enterprises, ethnicities).

This definitional separation of the state and society is a positive hindrance to investigations into the social implications and outcomes of democracy and of political rule in general. We may in this respect compare recent civil society discourse with a couple of other major conceptualisations of modern social science, with respect to the key actor they focus on – the kind of action and the forms the outcome of the action takes.

Three state-society discourses

	<i>Model Actor</i>	<i>Mode of Action</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Modernisation	The state	Pol. mandate	Social change
Corporatism	Implicit symmetry of state & society	Interest intermediation	Socio-economic policy
Civil society	Society	Exercise of Citizenship	Democratic procedures

Finally, current (in contrast to Hegelian) civil society discourse conceives of society primarily from a political angle. Society is viewed and evaluated mainly from its bearing upon the polity. This means neglecting the social texture and the cultural timbre of societies. It is a noteworthy polar contrast to the Swedish tendency of conceiving the state in economic terms, as the “public sector”.

Above all, it is this narcissistic politicisation of society which renders civil society discourse so inept in dealing with the outcomes of the politica

Transcending Civil Society

The idealised, over-politicised, nationally unproblematised conceptions of the social world built into the current concept of civil society may be overcome by going further in three directions.

The Social Production of Citizens

Instead of delimiting civil society by definition away from the economy, from the private sphere of the family, and/or from the “primordial” *ethnos* as a special sphere where public citizenship is exercised, it seems to me more fruitful to raise questions about what kind of citizens a given society in a given period tends to create. This type of question cannot be adequately answered with reference to the number of voluntary associations. Scandinavia and the United States, for instance, both score very high on associational density, and both are stable democracies. However, their polities put out very different policies, and the kind of civic input into the political process is also very different between the two.

Pertinent questions would then be asked about:

The allocation of economic, social, and cultural resources to the citizenry, the amount of such resources available and their distribution among the citizens.

The provision of role-models and role-patterns.

The historical structuration of expectations and fears with regard to life and society.

Structures of opportunity

The above may amount to a large-scale social scientific research programme, but it may also be approached more summarily, as something many concerned and informed citizens know a good deal about. From both angles a vista is opened up, which the normativity of current civil society discourse tends to hide or to obscure.

The Public Sphere as a Reality

Jürgen Habermas (1962) once made a brilliant empirical historical study of the elusive but important social phenomenon, the *Öffentlichkeit*, usually rendered in English as “public sphere”. However, in contemporary theoretical discussion, including Habermas’s own work, normative ideals of the public sphere have crowded out analyses of how the current political public sphere actually operates.

If one wanted to bring the public sphere into theoretically relevant analysis, it might be fruitful to conceptualise it as a “field” in Pierre Bourdieu’s (1992) sense, i.e., as a field of force and battles, rather than as an intellectual café conversation. This would entail looking into the topography of the public landscape. That is, into channels and locks into the public debate; the interrelations of different “sub-fields” or publics, e.g., of organisations and of the media; the roads to the top, to public leadership, and their pitfalls. How is “public(icity) capital” accumulated, and transformed into “political capital”?

Trans-Cultural, Supra-State Normative Orders

If anything in the above critique of current civil society discourse is correct, then not much is to be expected from recent hopes and talk

about a European or a global civil society. Again, such a civil society would certainly be a good thing from a democratic point of view, but the normative focus is, again, likely to cloud the vision of major issues involved.

In order to get a handle on the attempts at, and embryonic developments of, supra-state and transcultural normative orders, global and regional, it seems to me crucial not to lose sight of something civil society discourse tends to define away, i.e., the entanglement and the interactions of state and non-state actors. For the foreseeable future such involvement and such interactions are what will decide global and regional governance, where the latter is not overwhelmingly an inter-state affair, as is the case with the European Union. And the problem with the “democratic deficit” of the EU is not so much the non-integration of national civil societies, as the deliberate insulation of both the Union and the member polities from popular influence, e.g., in the new key areas of monetary policy and military policy (from the Kosovo war onwards).

The rise and the political recognition of resourceful international non-governmental organisations and their inclusion in the UN machinery of conferences, and of resolution and convention drafting, are very important new developments, but they are not an emergent emancipation of an international civil society from the nation-states and their international organisations. Rather, the pattern is one of some NGOs and some states striving to link up in order to influence other states. The new international jurisdiction, with its powerful signals of the War Crimes Tribunal on former Yugoslavia and the Pinochet case, is basically an inter-state affair. Global satellite television is indeed a new public sphere, but its difference – as strongly asymmetric communication – from the *agora* or the *salon* seems to be apparent enough to enable us to hesitate before deeming it a global civil society in the making.

It is the new patterns of inter-state, of nation-state and NGO, and of nation-state and global media, interactions, in the welter of accelerated or changed global processes of finance, trade, migration, and cultural encounters, that need to be unravelled, evaluated, and acted upon.

Democracy, Human Rights, and Social Justice

Democracy is, above all else, a procedure, a principle of sovereignty, a rule of legitimacy, a manner of decision-making. But a procedure with a specific meaning, one ideally expressing the rule of the demos, the people. Looking at the ideal and the reality of democracy, then, has to mean going beyond procedures and manners of civility and enquiring into the human outcomes of democracy. In other words, examining questions of democracy and human rights, of democracy and social justice and injustice.

In this vein, the twentieth-century record of liberal democracies appears appalling. We may try to disentangle it by distinguishing the democratic record with reference to the annihilation of others, the institutionalised humiliation and oppression of others, the human sacrifice of their own populations, and the social sacrifice of their own populations.

With regard to the direct physical annihilation of civilian populations, modern liberal democracies, in particular the British and the American, by far surpass any pre-twentieth century regime in numbers killed. In terms of killings, the terror bombings of German and Japanese cities in the last years of World War II were more than comparable to the Stalinist terror of 1937-38. In the former, about 900,000 were killed (Parkin, 1977: 88, 159), in the latter almost 700,000 were executed (Getty, 1993). It might be added that the terror bombers are still democratic heroes, while the leading Stalinist executioners were themselves executed and the (bulk of) their victims rehabilitated. True, this is not at all on the same scale as the Nazi German Holocaust, but that seems a far-flung qualification. It will, of course, be objected, that there is a crucial difference between an enemy population during an external war and the internal enemies of a given polity. But the whole point of the concept of human rights is that there is no such difference. The killing of an unarmed civilian is a violation of human rights wherever and whenever it takes place.

The willingness of liberal democracies to inflict pain, including death, upon unarmed civilians did not end with World War II. The current

on-going, decade-long, destruction of Iraqi society by the US and the UK blockade, with the loyal support of all Western Europe and many other liberal democracies, is a vivid example. How many civilian deaths it has caused, nobody knows, but UN estimates run into several hundreds of thousands. The Kosovo war started out with some proclaimed humanitarian constraints, which were soon overcome, however. In the end, the war was won precisely by destroying the civilian infrastructure of Serbia, factories, bridges, power stations, and not by any military engagement. On top of this is now being added an economic blockade. Amnesty International (but not the War Crimes Tribunal) has had the courage and consistency to bring up these liberal violations of elementary human rights (in its 6 June 2000 report).

The completely ethnocentric conception of freedom and democracy in liberal democracies was displayed in the immediate aftermath of World War II, supposedly fought and won on behalf of freedom, democracy, and human rights. While the defeated powers were treated with magnanimity, the French and the Dutch violently re-asserted their right to rule other peoples and to extract the wealth of their territories. Britain did not fight for the Indian Crown Jewels, but everywhere else it did, from Malacca to Africa. In the US, white racism was re-affirmed, in spite of the “Dixiecrat” rebellion among the Democrats.

Here, however, liberal democracies have undergone enormous internal change during the last third of the twentieth century. Racism, enshrined in North America from the first New England colonies, was outlawed after more than three-hundred years. On the other hand, the idea of recruiting foreign workers, without political and social rights, the idea of “guest workers” to do labour which the native population does not want to do itself, was subscribed to by West Central European liberal democracies (Austria, West Germany, Switzerland) in the 1960s.

While the Anglo-American democracies – regardless of the party in power – are still prepared to continue their wars to the point of the last Iraqi or the last Serb, in the same way as they were prepared to go on until the last German and the last Japanese were left, the willingness of liberal democracies to sacrifice their own populations has undergone a

dramatic change since the end of the Cold War. During that period this policy was part of a poker method by which to threaten, and be prepared to take on, a full-scale nuclear war. But in the Gulf and Kosovo wars, a major, self-imposed constraint of the liberal democracies was the wish to avoid, or at most to contemplate a handful, of casualties on their own side. The turn away from the conscription of citizens to professional soldiers may be taken as another sign that current liberal democracies are less prepared to human sacrifice than was previously the case. Here, World War I was the apotheosis of a liberal human slaughterhouse, as exemplified by Verdun, the Somme, Gallipoli, and other types of necropolis

There has always been quite a distance between, on the one hand, the liberal *salon* or café, and the ordinary people. In fact, the very “civility”, or polish, of liberal civil society excluded, and was often meant to exclude, ordinary people. And land reform, trade unionism, and social entitlements were rarely the objects of concern of liberal civil society. In power, liberal democracy has allowed much less, and much more intermittent, economic redistribution than nineteenth-century liberals and conservatives feared and than nineteenth-century socialists and radicals hoped for. Historically speaking, wartime mobilisation has been more effective than democracy per se in redistributing income and wealth. The long-run historical tendency during the twentieth century has been one of intra-state equalisation, primarily through the very richest tenth of the population losing out to the “middle classes”. Those at the bottom of the scale have hardly gained anything in relative terms.

However, even this uneven and limited tendency towards equalisation has largely come to a halt over the past two decades. In several cases it has been turned into its opposite. General income inequality has increased again, and in the few cases where there has occurred more educational opportunity across social classes this has stopped. Between nation-states, economic inequality has accelerated its long-term growth.

The personal and cultural rights of individuals have, by and large, broadened during the course of the century, but liberal democracy as

such has hardly constituted a general vanguard. The Communist Soviet Union, for instance, much preceded Latin Western Europe, from Belgium to Italy, at the level of women's rights, and Western Europe generally in terms of national cultural rights. Female dress (at school) is still a matter of public politics in France. The United States, on the other hand, has often been a forerunner in the institution of women's rights, and has been so again during the last third of the twentieth century, in some respects together with the Scandinavian countries. While far from always effective, these rights of non-discrimination and non-harassment constitute an albeit belated major step forward for human rights.

The intrinsic social achievements of liberal democracy seem to limit themselves to one thing mainly, to the prevention of large-scale famine, on the scale of Stalin's Ukraine, British colonial Bengal, or Maoist "Great Leap" China (Sen, 1999). That is important, but pretty modest in view of the ideals of liberalism and classical democracy.

Why have there been these persistent (re)productions of cruelty, discrimination, humiliation, and poverty on the part of liberal democracies? Apart from the historical argument that all liberal democracies stem from authoritarian, non-democratic, patriarchal societies of privilege and exploitation, instead of from a social contract, there seem to be two major reasons. One is that liberal democracy shares with most other political and ethical conceptions a great capacity for demonising the Other, against whom anything is permissible. It is noteworthy that fifty years of human rights discourse, pushed by liberal democracies, have had virtually no impact whatsoever on the war conduct of liberal democracies, be they high or low intensity wars, external or internal, declared or undeclared.

In the last decades of the twentieth century liberal democracies have also found a new weapon for inflicting suffering on large populations with unwanted political regimes – the economic blockade. First tried out, with limited success but much perseverance, against the Cubans, applied with great vigour and with punishing efficacy for ten years against the Iraqis, it is currently being meted out against the Serbs.

This enduring readiness to make large numbers of people suffer because of a leadership which does not behave according to an invoked norm draws upon a moralising streak of secularised liberalism, which is probably of monotheistic, and in this case Christian, origin. The Others are not simply crude and ignorant barbarians. They are also breaking the law of the one true faith.

In contrast to authoritarian dictatorships, which often demonise an internal Other, liberal democracies usually see their enemies as outside their own state borders, although these may include a considerable number of enemy agents or suspects.

Internally, on the other hand – including internally in relation to the whole oecumene of non-enemies, i.e., globally – liberal democracies have a persistent tendency towards *marginalising* others. The marginalisation of some people is an inherent, constant possibility of liberal individualism. The capitalist economics of all presently existing liberal democracies makes this a constant tendency. The experience of the twentieth century demonstrates that only to some extent, during some periods, and under some conditions, is democracy capable of counteracting this tendency. The best conditions have been provided by war-time mobilisation, which has been a great engine of full employment, economic levelling, and civic participation. The World War II experiences in Britain and the United States are the most striking examples. But the post-war boom, with its regional rapprochements, and the mobilised peace decade from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, were also major periods of inclusion in most liberal democracies.

Current tendencies are less positive. The international picture is mixed. There is, on the one hand, a certain progress in human rights discourse, perhaps even in practice, through the UN machinery. The Pinochet case and the War Crimes Tribunal on Yugoslavia are at least signalling the risks of high profile violations of human rights, although the second suffers from being part of a starkly ambiguous North American and Western European set of operations with regard to former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, the economic polarisation of the world is continuing.

Domestically, most liberal democracies are ending the twentieth century by moving towards more inequality, socio-economic exclusion, and internal violence. As hinted at above, there is one major, though partial, exception – the position of women. In Western Europe and North America, but also, although at a different pace and level, in some, but far from all, parts of the Third World, women have recently made substantial gains – in higher education, in politics, and in general social rights. Otherwise, the general tendency is towards more economic inequality, more exclusion from employment, wider social differences in life and health expectancy, and more violent crime. When and where poverty and economic exclusion increase, women and children tend to be hit hardest. This is the impact, in albeit varying degrees, of post-democratic liberalism in the West, of structural adjustment programmes in the Third World, of the financial crash in the one successful non-Western economic region (East Asia, with the exception of China), and of Eastern European post-Communism.

While there are many fewer dictatorships in the world than, say, twenty years ago, it is much more difficult to say whether there are fewer people living in misery, and if there are, this is due overwhelmingly, not to democratisation, but to the economic development of East and Southeast Asia.

Indeed, the most recent twentieth century social reports by international organisations are rather apocalyptic. The UN's *Human Development Report for Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS 1999* found that "a human crisis of monumental proportions is emerging in the former Soviet Union". (Here cited from the World Bank/William Davidson Institute publication *Transition*, August 1999, p. 19). The World Bank *Global Economic Prospects* concluded in December 1999: "the negative social impact of the East Asian Crisis and consequent crises in Russia and Brazil has been enormous. The increase in consumption poverty has been significant. In addition, the crisis has resulted in ... sharp declines in middle-class standards of living." (p. 47). And the UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children 2000* exclaimed in its "executive summary": "Despite the progress made on many of the goals

set at the 1990 World Summit for Children, this has been a decade of undeclared war on women, adolescents and children as poverty, conflict, chronic social instability and preventable diseases such as HIV/AIDS threaten their human rights and sabotage their development.”

In the face of these stark realities, which certainly show no “democracy dividend”, I do not think we are much helped by theories of justice and of civil society, however noble and ingenious, or by any affirmation of basic values, however, humane. What then?

In terms of discourse I can see two paths which are worth pursuing. Both are immanent critiques of mainstream discourse – there is currently no counter-flow in a humanist direction. One starts from the discourse of human rights, generally recognised and generally violated. Taking human rights seriously, the environmental rights of the human species as well as the rights of every individual of humankind to a life-course of freedom and development on par with the possibilities of the species, would have very far-reaching social consequences. In the world of limitations in which we live, it would at least provide us with a clear yardstick by which to measure the prevailing wisdom of the powers that be.

Secondly, the current self-celebrations of liberal democracy seem to be an excellent occasion for taking democracy seriously, i.e., critically. As hinted at above, this would entail hammering at the arbitrary boundaries of the *demos*, raising questions, and even providing provisional answers, about the social production of democratic citizens, about the institutional meanings of “self-government” or “popular rule”.

Practically, the basic way to change an evil world is through the empowerment of the powerless, of the disadvantaged, who are indeed those most competent to define social injustice. The twentieth century saw the rise and the decline of a powerful empowerment of the disadvantaged, the labour movement. There were other important popular movements. Nineteenth-century European and American nationalism spread around the world, in particular to the Colonised. The women’s movement grew into a major force, without being ever very strongly organised. However, the twentieth century was lived mainly through

the prism of the labour movement. It was the only major male support of the women's movement, the only significant metropolitan support of the anti-colonial movement. It was a model for its Christian Democratic emulator and competitor, and a model for its Fascist enemies. The potential threat it posed was at the back of the minds of the major bourgeois social reformers. The labour movement produced both the major revolutions of the century – directly in the Russian case, more indirectly by moulding the revolutionary cadre in the Chinese – and the most important programme of comprehensive social reform in the form of Scandinavian Social Democracy. The enduring strength of the movement ensured the lasting success of this last, while its weakness made possible the dictatorial development of the revolutions.

On the threshold of the twentieth century, the forces of human rights and of consistent democracy – as one would say today, instead of the more self-confident “human emancipation” with which Marx was concerned – are not to be found in or around one major movement. Nevertheless, both the sociologist and the concerned citizen in me would concur that progress in human rights and in the reality of democracy will be decided by the social movements of those directly affected by the deficits of human rights and of democracy, by their demands for what they take as social justice.

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