



What Is Democracy (and What Is Its Raison D’Etre)?

ABSTRACT: *This article aims to say what democracy is or what the predicate ‘democratic’ means, as opposed to saying what is good, right, or desirable about it. The basic idea—by no means a novel one—is that a democratic system is one that features substantial equality of political power. More distinctively it is argued that ‘democratic’ is a relative gradable adjective, the use of which permits different, contextually determined thresholds of democraticness. Thus, a system can be correctly called ‘democratic’ even if it does not feature perfect equality of power. The article’s central undertaking is to give greater precision to the operative notion(s) of power. No complete or fully unified measure of power is offered, but several conceptual tools are introduced that help give suitable content to power measurement. These tools include distinctions between conditional versus unconditional power and direct versus indirect power. Using such tools, a variety of prima facie problems for the power equality approach are addressed and defused. Finally, the theory is compared to epistemic and deliberative approaches to democracy; and reasons are offered for the attractiveness of democracy that flows from the power equality theme.*

KEYWORDS: democracy, power, comparative power, conditional vs. unconditional power, political philosophy, *Citizens United*, error theory, representative democracy, minimal decisive set, epistemic approach, deliberative approach, history of political philosophy

I. An Agenda for Democratic Theory

The first question to ask about democracy might be, ‘What is it?’ Some theorists, however, assume that it is reasonably clear what democracy is. They also often assume that democracy is clearly the best, most just, and most legitimate form of government. Their first and most persistent question therefore concerns its normative status or rationale: ‘Why is democracy the best, most just, or most legitimate form of government?’ By contrast, I shall focus on the ‘What is it?’

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question, which can also be called the *constitution* question. Or, switching to the formal or linguistic mode: ‘What does “democracy” *mean*?’ Starting with the constitution question does not imply its greater importance compared to the normative or ‘rationalizing’ questions. For one thing, democracy’s normative properties are likely to be grounded in its constitutive properties. If democracy is a good type of system, this is *in virtue of* its having constitutive properties X, Y, and Z. Thus, the task of characterizing the latter properties is a good one to begin with (and pursue in detail).

Some political theorists are dubious about the use of analytical methods in the study of democracy. Philip Pettit (2012), for example, rejects any appeal to analytical methods:

[The theory I advocate] does not count as analytical in character; it does not offer an analysis of the term ‘democracy’ as a theory of causation might offer us an analysis of the term ‘cause’. What it offers, rather, is an ideal that democracy, at its best, might be required to achieve or approximate. (2012: 180)

Although I shall not present exactly an ‘analysis’ of democracy, the bulk of my project falls broadly within this tradition.

The question ‘What is democracy?’ should be distinguished from the question ‘What is *liberal* democracy?’ Many writers assume that the rights and liberties associated with liberalism are automatically required parts of democracy as such. But I disagree. Fans of democracy, of course, usually advocate liberalism as well, which includes these rights and freedoms. But the connection between liberalism and democracy is complex. Democracy, understood as (egalitarian) rule by the people, contrasts with monarchy, autocracy, and oligarchy, a family of contrasts as old as ancient Greece. Liberalism, with its affiliated set of rights and freedoms, is a younger tradition.¹ Of course, I do not fault theorists who embrace both democracy and liberalism. But they should not assume that one automatically subsumes the other. Our present agenda concerns democracy only, not the conjunction of democracy and liberalism.

Many countries not only enjoy democracy but advocate its adoption by others. This is especially true of the United States. As one observer remarks, ‘[T]he world’s only superpower is rhetorically and militarily promoting a political system that remains undefined—and it is staking its credibility and treasure on that pursuit’ (Horowitz 2006: 114, quoted in Kekic 2007). Horowitz is pointing out that American officials—from presidents on down—promote democracy for other nations without explaining which of its features make it so essential. Nor is there much if any consensus among American officials as to what comprises a democracy. Shouldn’t we figure out what democracy *is*—and explain it publicly—before insisting that others adopt it? If this theoretical task is assigned to academics (as seems reasonable), those academics should not dodge this fundamental question.

¹ Admittedly, the Greek concept of democracy did include the notion of *isonomia*, equality of citizens before the law. But this is not coextensive with the list of rights and liberties claimed by modern liberalism.

Thus, the constitution question should be the first order of business for democratic theorists, and I shall follow this precept here. In the paper's final section (sec. 13), however, a brief attempt will be made to pinpoint its (primary) *raison d'être*.

2. Democracy and Equality of Political Power

Let us begin by examining a standard feature of democracy that might be proffered as its signature property, namely, decision making by majority vote. Might this qualify as the be-all and end-all of democracy, as its most essential property? For example, Schumpeter (1942) writes: 'democracy is just a system in which rulers are selected by competitive elections' (quoted in Przeworski 1999: 23). Things cannot be so simple, however. For starters, the question must be asked: majority vote by whom? The standard answer is that democracy requires universal suffrage, usually confined to adult citizens, which raises the question of who should count as citizens, an important question I do not have space to address here. A second requirement for democracy, however, is equal voting, that is, one person, one vote. Even these features, however, do not fully cover the ones commonly sought for a full-fledged democracy. It isn't enough to let all citizens vote. Their votes must be tabulated accurately, and ballot stuffing is not permitted. Voters should be allowed to register on a fair and equal basis; the ballot must be secret, and so forth. Yet another issue is how candidates are nominated. Is the nomination process confined to a select group, perhaps people already in power? That would certainly be a count against a state qualifying as democratic. These are familiar testing points that come into play when appraising a government's claim to being democratic.

Two research outfits, the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House, periodically rate some 165 countries in terms of their 'democraticness', using a variety of criteria such as the foregoing in their measures of democraticness. In its measure of 'electoral democracy', for example, Freedom House includes the following bundle of criteria: (1) a competitive, multiparty political system; (2) universal adult suffrage; (3) regularly contested elections on the basis of secret ballots, reasonable ballot security, and the absence of massive voter fraud; and (4) significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open campaigning (see Kekic's 'The EIU's Democracy Index', 2007). What, if anything, gives unity to this diverse and eclectic set of criteria?

Let me comment on these Freedom House criteria, taking them in a slightly different order. One item is universal adult suffrage. This suggests that genuine democracies give every adult citizen a 'say' about the question at hand. Next consider two additional tests: reasonable ballot security and the absence of massive voter fraud. If both of these are satisfied, every voter's vote is actually counted in the total, so each voter can thereby exert some (directed) influence on the final result. In short, each voter can exercise some degree of *power* by means of voting—not enough power to carry the day, but something that serves as a vector force in the direction of the voter's preferred outcome. (The idea of a vector force is

suggested in Goldman [1999a], where the image of a participant who helps one side in a tug-of-war by pulling on the rope in a particular direction is introduced to illustrate a vector force.) Another Freedom House criterion is a competitive, multiparty political system. This implies that ordinary citizens are not stuck with a single party or a power elite that exclusively nominates candidates for office. Citizens may form and/or join a different party and exert influence by nominating an alternative slate of candidates. One might characterize these options as helping to solidify a measure of power with respect to the electoral process. How is ballot secrecy relevant to power? In the days before secret ballots, bosses could readily know how workers voted and could retaliate if they disapproved of these votes, for example, by firing workers. As will be argued later, this sort of cost (or the threat of it) was a significant constraint on workers' electoral power. A secret ballot provides protection against the undercutting of citizens' legitimate power and thereby protects equalization. Interpreting the rationales for the Freedom House criteria in the foregoing ways shows clearly that they all play roles in making the electoral power of individual citizens more equal than it would otherwise be. Satisfaction of these criteria correlates with greater and more equal political power, and this is the 'unity' I find in their inclusion as indicators of democraticness. More specifically, then, here is my (preliminary) hypothesis about what democracy fundamentally consists in:

(Equality of Political Power) (EPP). A political system is democratic if and only if it is a system in which citizens have equal political power.

A number of political philosophers have advanced roughly similar accounts of what democracy is (or what it is at its best). These include Philip Pettit (2012), Niko Kolodny (2014a, 2014b), Ronald Dworkin (2000), and perhaps Thomas Christiano (1996). Of course, there are some notable differences between these approaches and mine. Pettit focuses on the people as a collective entity having power (or control) over the state, whereas I highlight relations of approximate equality of power among citizens. Kolodny argues that democracy requires *social* as well as *political* equality, whereas I don't venture down that road. I utilize a somewhat distinctive methodology as compared with most political philosophers, relying in part on techniques of philosophy of language and linguistics. This leads me to highlight the gradability of democraticness, so that perfect power equality is by no means necessary for democracy. I also propose (below) a number of refinements in the measurement of power, drawing distinctions that add suppleness to how power relations can be assessed.

3. Testing the Equal Political Power Conception of Democracy

I have phrased the hypothesis in 'if and only if' terms, using the familiar language of philosophical analysis. Traditionally, however, philosophical analyses are intended to capture ordinary people's understanding of a term or expression. As I said at

the outset, my first aim is to capture something like the ordinary understanding of 'democracy'. However, apart from the proffered interpretations and elaborations of the Freedom House criteria, is there any evidence that democracy is commonly understood in this way?

Here is how we might test this hypothesis. Consider a highly visible event portending substantial change in a political system. Suppose that even political novices expect this event to diminish the amount of power equality that previously prevailed in the system. Will ordinary people see it as a case in which the system's democratic status threatens to be negatively impacted? EPP predicts that even novices will see things this way. I shall now present evidence of precisely this sort. Admittedly, this evidence has not been gathered in a rigorously scientific way. Thus, it is merely suggestive rather than clearly confirmatory of EPP. Nonetheless, a genuine scientific (survey-style) experiment, with suitable controls, could be conducted on the model of this casual assembling of evidence. My argument assumes that similar results would emerge.

In two closely related cases, *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010) and *McCutcheon v. Federal Elections Commission* (2014), the United States Supreme Court opened the doors to electoral contributions in virtually unlimited amounts, enabling billionaires to make huge contributions and thereby exert ostensibly enormous weight in federal elections. It is hard not to view this as a change in the level of equality between the megarich and the rest of the citizenry. I assume that this much is true of the situation. The question, then, is whether people would also regard this as a substantial change in America's status *as a democracy*. If EPP is correct (as currently stated, or in slightly amended forms we shall give it shortly), it should have this result. With this in view, I assembled a number of passages drawn from readers' comments on a *New York Times* article that had appeared in the wake of the *McCutcheon* decision under the headline 'Supreme Court Strikes Down Overall Political Donation Cap'. The passages reproduced below are not a random sample of the nearly 2,000 comments the *Times* received on this topic (available online). Nor would it be easy to construct any standard statistical analysis of these comments since (for example) writers were not responding to any specific question(s). Nonetheless, I have selected nine of the first forty comments (which seemed to be in no particular order) and pinpointed some telling passages. Each strikes me as confirming the content of EPP or one thing predicted by EPP. Those *New York Times* readers see the court decisions as a significant change in the equality of political power in America, and they also see the effect of this as highly damaging to democracy, or the quality of democracy, in this country. Accordingly I interpret this, broadly speaking, as confirmatory of EPP. Of course, alternative analyses might also be able to accommodate this result. The point is that EPP at least passes this test. In addition, the phraseology of many of the statements articulates the gradability of democracies, which will figure in an amended version of EPP below.

New York Times readers' comments on the SCOTUS *McCutcheon* decision (*New York Times* 2014):

AD New York, 2 April 2014. A constitutional amendment to stop this insanity is necessary if we want to remain anything resembling a democracy.

Sajwert New Hampshire, 2 April 2014. When money talks beginning in 2014 we will begin to watch Democracy walk out the door into the ether.

DR.G Ohio, 3 April 2014. SCOTUS is progressively dismantling democracy and giving a bigger voice to the rich in determining elections.

Patty W Sammamish Washington, 3 April 2014. Anyone who votes republican after the 5 to 4 conservative/republican court vote on Wednesday is guilty of destroying our democracy.

James G. Fairfield County, CT, 3 April 2014. We are now a lot closer to Fascism than we are to Democracy.

Jean Boutcher Washington, DC, 3 April 2014. I can see the fall of democracy and the rise of plutocracy down the road.

HapinOregon Brookings, Oregon, 3 April 2014. In 2014 The Supreme Court of the United States has ended The Great Experiment and codified the US an oligarchic plutocracy.

ipray4pc Chicago 3 April 2014. Yesterday's Supreme Court majority decision will turbo charge the destruction of democracy. God help the United States of America.

Mimi A Summit, NJ, 3 April 2014. The Roberts led court continues to eviscerate our grand experiment as our democracy slowly dies.

Internal evidence suggests that the great majority of these writers are Democrats. Other writers, in all likelihood Republicans, submitted rather different letters, which do not conclude that American democracy is collapsing or withering away. Does this undermine my interpretation of the evidence? No. To undermine my interpretation it would have to be shown that those other writers recognized a major change in the power equality level in America but disagreed that this wrecks havoc for democracy in America. I found no writers who expressed this combination of positions.

4. The Threat of an Error Theory

Is the EPP approach surprising? The very etymology of the term 'democracy' should keep it from being a surprise. The Greek word *demos* refers to the (common) people, and *kratos* can be translated as 'power'. Thus translated, democracy implies 'power by the people'. The Greek phrase does not signal the notion of power *equality*, but this is a core idea in the modern conception of democracy. Clearly, the etymology of 'democracy' is in accord with EPP. The question arises, however, whether equality of political power between citizens isn't too strong a requirement.

This is worrisome for the definition if equality refers to *strict* equality. Does any existing political system meet this condition? If not, how can EPP be correct (as an analysis)? Wouldn't we have to say that if the EPP formula were correct, then people's ordinary ascriptions of 'democracy' or 'democratic' to existing political systems are systematically erroneous? Wouldn't we then be committed to an *error theory*? But error theories are widely disparaged in philosophy as unattractive. Where should we turn?

Contemporary semantic theory, as practiced in both linguistics and philosophy of language, offers many resources for illuminating the flexibility of language use; for the material on semantic theory that follows I am indebted to communications with Robert Beddor and to his development of similar moves in a different context (Beddor, unpublished). One thing pretty clear about the adjective 'democratic' is that it is what linguists call a 'gradable adjective'. It admits of modifiers (e.g., 'very democratic', 'somewhat democratic') and comparatives (e.g., 'The U.K. is more democratic than Russia'). However, there are two kinds of gradable adjectives: (1) *relative* gradable adjectives and (2) *maximum degree* gradable adjectives (e.g., 'full' or 'certain'). A standard test for whether a gradable adjective is of the relative or maximum degree type is whether it is felicitous to say, 'X is A, but X could be more A'. If this is felicitous, it is evidence that A is a relative gradable adjective. This holds for 'fast', for example, where it is felicitous to say, 'The car is fast, but it could be faster'. Applying this test to 'democratic', it seems pretty clear that 'democratic' should be classed as a relative gradable adjective. The sentence 'The United States today is democratic, but it was even more democratic before Citizens United' is perfectly felicitous.

Given that 'democratic' is a relative gradable adjective, there should be some utterances in which it occurs that are comparative, as in the above-mentioned example involving Citizens United. We shall want to make use of such comparatives in much of the rest of this paper. However, there are obviously many noncomparative occurrences of 'democratic' as well. How shall we make sense of the latter? We can best make sense of them—without encountering any threat of an error theory—by adopting a further linguistic maneuver: an appeal to *contextual variability*.

How can contextual variability enter into satisfaction conditions for utterances containing 'democratic'? Assume that 'democratic' is associated with a scale of degrees from 0 to 1, ranging from extreme *inequality* in political power (between citizens) to exact equality in political power. Call this the 'Power Equality Scale'. We can then say that, uttered in a specific context C, 'X is democratic' determines some rung on the Power Equality Scale. An utterance of 'X is democratic' is true in context C, then, if and only if the rung X occupies on the Power Equality Scale coincides with or exceeds the relevant C-determined threshold. Context variability thereby allows somewhat different propositions to be expressed by different utterances of 'X is democratic', depending on the linguistic context. It allows for both strict and loose standards. Even if no existing governments are ideally democratic, many utterances of the form 'X is democratic', applied to actual governments, can come out true when loose standards are applied. Thus, the threat of an error theory is easily avoided.

Having noted that ‘democratic’ is a relative gradable adjective, it is clear that EPP can be improved upon by a more complex formula that reflects this gradability (for noncomparative uses of ‘democratic’). Here is such a formula:

(*EPPG*). A political system is democratic to degree *G* if and only if its citizens have equal political power to degree *G*.

This formula expresses the present theory with greater precision than EPP does. To keep things simple, however, I shall usually orient the discussion around EPP—or related formulas that introduce additional modifications as we proceed. Though I make no further explicit reference to it, contextual variability in predications of ‘democratic’ is also presupposed in what follows. Readers are invited to mentally supply a reference to gradation, as formulated by *EPPG*, wherever relevant.

5. Measuring Comparative Power

Setting aside the issue of contextual variability, it is obvious that a full and precise account of comparative power among individuals is an essential element in elucidating a conception of democracy based on equality of power. What are the prospects for developing such an account? This is a large undertaking, and I do not have such a full and precise account to present. However, it is possible to identify some helpful ingredients of such a conception, and this is what I aim to do here. I shall take some steps toward constructing a ‘measure’ of power, or rather a family of such measures, and illustrate their applicability to political contexts. Different members of the power family are not equivalent to one another, however, and serious questions will remain of how to fuse them into a single index with multiple members. Addressing this final question is a further step I won’t undertake here. But I hope it will be possible to see, once these proposals are on the table, that such a further step might be feasible. What I provide here, then, are some beginnings, based partly on earlier proposals of mine and as well as on those of other theorists, that could ultimately produce a unified theory. Having introduced these tools for the measurement of power, I shall illustrate how their deployment can address some problems facing EPP, such as representative democracy and persistent minorities (or the tyranny of the majority). Along the way, I consider modifications of EPP that might enhance its prospects.

6. Power and Comparisons of Power

Because EPP’s approach to democraticness depends so critically on the notion of power and power comparisons, we should clarify what it is for individuals to have power and to have more or less power than others (with respect to the same issue). Otherwise, how can we talk meaningfully of greater or lesser amounts of power equality (across citizens)? Accordingly, the middle section of this article is devoted to exploring tools for measuring power.

My basic approach to power takes the same form as familiar conditional, or subjunctive, analyses of ability and control. (For previous similar accounts of social power, see Goldman [1972, 1974]; certain new features of the accounts offered here have profited from Maier [2014]). I shall formulate it this way:

(CA) S has the ability to A if and only if S would A if S tried to A.

In other words, S would succeed in executing an attempted action or would succeed in getting a desired outcome if S tried to do it or get it. The (preliminary) formula for power would be the following:

(CA_p) S has the power to do A (or get A to occur) if and only if S would succeed in doing A (or getting it to occur) if S tried to do A (or tried to make it occur).

Although the condition is formulated in this hypothetical, or subjunctive, form, it is presumed that some categorical states of affairs function as 'enablers' of S's ability or power. I call such enablers *resources*. In social and political power, the principal resources are things an agent S 'possesses' (in a wide sense of this term). This includes internal resources, such as knowledge, and external resources, such as legal rights, political office, or money.

Conditional analyses of abilities and powers face problems raised by metaphysicians. One set of problems is what should be said if an agent *would* succeed in getting A if he or she tried but *cannot try*. That is, S has some psychological state or impediment that prevents him or her from trying (or causally determines that S will not try). Although CA_p implies that S has the power to get A, critics argue that this is incorrect. S shouldn't be credited with such a power in the specified circumstances. Since this is a general problem, not specific to political power, I will not devote a great deal of attention to it. As a stopgap solution, we might help ourselves to the notion of a 'capacity to try', which I won't try to analyze. Since the capacity to try is presumably a psychological matter, whereas the power to act and obtain outcomes (especially in the political domain) is primarily a nonpsychological matter, this is not objectionably circular. The expanded analysis reads as follows:

(CA_p*) S has the power to do A (or get A to occur) if and only if
 (1) S has the capacity to try to A (or make A occur), and
 (2) S would succeed in A-ing (or getting A to occur) if S tried to do A (or tried to make A occur).

Readers preferring a different approach to this traditional problem may substitute their own preferred approach.

Another familiar problem with conditional analyses, raised for dispositions generally, is generated by so-called 'finkish' cases in which an object gains or loses a disposition (e.g., to conduct electricity) precisely when the activation conditions obtain. Intuitively, it is wrong to ascribe the disposition to the object despite the

fact that the subjunctive conditional seems to be true (Martin 1994). Analogous cases called ‘maskers’ and ‘mimickers’ are ones in which interference between a disposition and its associated conditional masks the disposition (Smith 1977; Johnston 1992; for an overview, see Cross 2012). For example, a glass’s fragility may be masked by styrofoam material in which the glass is packed, because the glass would then not break if it were dropped; nonetheless, it remains fragile. I won’t try to address this problem, although analogues of it may hold for the kinds of power analyses I shall offer. The merit of the conditional approach on offer should be judged by the wide range of examples it illuminates, even if some sticky counterexamples remain.

Working in the spirit of conditional analyses, consider a preliminary pass at what it means for a person to have power with respect to an issue, where an issue is a set of mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive possible outcomes for an event or states of affairs. (The proposals that follow are abbreviated versions of more detailed proposals I presented some decades ago [1972, 1974]). Our first analysandum is what we will call ‘individual power’ with respect to an issue U . In the simplest case the outcomes of U are u and $not-u$. Individual power is the power of a single agent S , where the circumstances of the actual world are held fixed except for what S tries to do (and its upshots). Later I shall also refer to this kind of power as ‘unconditional power’, to contrast it with power that is partly dependent on the participation of other people.

S has individual power with respect to issue U if and only if
 (1) if S tried to bring about outcome u , then u would occur/obtain,
 and (2) if S tried to bring about outcome $not-u$, then $not-u$ would occur/obtain.

For example, S has individual power with respect to the issue of certain light L being on or being off if and only if S would obtain L ’s being on if S tried to obtain it and would obtain L ’s being off if S tried to obtain that. If L is initially on, successful trying to obtain its being on only requires S to *refrain* from flipping any relevant light switch. If L is initially off, successful trying to obtain its being on only requires S to flip a relevant switch.

Even in such simple cases successful exercise of a power commonly involves the deployment of three kinds of resources: (1) cognitive resources, (2) physiological resources, and (3) external items one ‘possesses’ or relationships with others. In the light example the pertinent cognitive resource would be knowing which switch controls L . This knowledge is important both for an agent who wants to leave the light in its current state as well as for one who wants to change its on/off status. The pertinent physiological resource is the physical capacity to make the relevant hand movement. Relevant external resources include a functioning light fixture suitably connected to an electrical system and an unexpired light bulb screwed into the fixture. In cases of political power, the third category may be exemplified by political rights possessed, e.g., the right to vote in a certain jurisdiction and the honesty of local poll workers. Instead of identifying an ‘issue’ with a partition of

outcomes, one might specify a dimension or continuum on which assorted partitions can be imposed. Some might have just two (jointly exhaustive) outcomes; others might have any finite number of outcomes. In the latter case, it's unclear what is required to have power with respect to an issue. For a partition with n outcomes, must one be able to obtain every outcome? Half of them? A quarter of them? This is a vague, unclear matter. However, it also suggests one way to compare people's power states with respect to a given issue and partition. Given a partition, the more outcomes of that partition are attainable for a given agent, the greater that agent's power vis-à-vis that partition.

One final strand in the measurement of individual power is *cost*. The rationale behind this idea is presented by John Harsanyi (1962: 69):

[S]uppose that an army commander becomes a prisoner of enemy troops, who try to force him at gun point to give a radio order to his army units to withdraw from a certain area. He may well have the power to give a contrary order, both in the sense of having the physical ability to do so and in the sense of there being a very good chance of his order being actually obeyed by his army units—but he can use this power only at the cost of his life . . . [I]t would clearly be very misleading in this situation to call him a powerful individual in the same sense as before his capture.

Generalizing from this case, we can say that the greater an agent's (expected) cost of trying to obtain outcome O , the less that agent's power with respect to O , even if trying would be successful.

7. Interpersonal and Participatory Comparisons of Power

It is time to consider the question of comparing different people's powers with respect to one another. Comparative power across individuals is the crux of how democratic a political system is, according to EPP. I won't present a full set of conditions for interpersonal power comparisons, but instead examine several factors that have a bearing on them. A general way to characterize power was suggested by Max Weber and C. Wright Mills.² Power, on their conception, is the ability to get what one wants despite the opposition of others. Keeping this in mind, here is a first condition for power superiority in a two-person 'head-to-head' context.

A sufficient condition of X having more power than Y with respect to issue U , or partition O of outcomes o_i , is that X would obtain any outcome o_i of O that X tries to obtain even if Y tries to obtain an alternative outcome $o_k \neq o_i$.

² Weber wrote: "Power" [*Macht*] is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance' (1947: 152). Mills wrote: 'By the powerful we mean, of course, those who are able to realize their will, even if others resist it' (1959: 9).

When no individual would be the winner for every outcome in the partition, it may be unclear who has greater power. It may be a sufficient condition of one having greater power than another that the first can win more outcomes than the second, but even this isn't clear. For example, if X could only obtain preferred outcomes at enormous cost, even being a potential winner for all outcomes might not mark X as more powerful.

In many cases an issue's outcome depends on preferences and actions of many individuals, not just two. The political realm is a salient case in point. For someone to 'get her way' on an issue of interest, it is often required that others share her preference and choice of action. Usually, it is only by participating in a joint or collective effort that one does obtain a preferred outcome. How is this kind of power—which we may call *participatory power*—to be measured?

Shapley and Shubik (1954) present an elegant approach to this problem for a major class of such cases, where only a single type of resource is relevant: the number of votes a person possesses. Restriction to a single type of power resource may be limiting, but it can work well for corporate bodies where the number of votes people possess commonly varies.

The Shapley-Shubik scheme invites us to consider all combinations of pro and con votes among members of a committee. Then, considering all permutations (orderings) of each combination, they invite us to count the number of times a given member is a 'pivot', that is, the number of times she belongs to a 'minimal decisive set' to complete a majority. Consider, for example, a four-person committee consisting of members A, B, C, D, in which A has 3 votes, B has 4 votes, C has 6 votes, and D has 10 votes. If all members vote, the total number of votes is 23, and a majority of (at least) twelve votes ensures a victory. Now suppose that all members vote for the same outcome, and consider the 24 possible permutations (orderings) of any such vote. Here are four of these 24 permutations: ABCD, BADC, CABD, and CDBA. Now a pivot, in a given permutation, is someone whose vote is the first in the permutation to complete a winning majority (a vote total of at least 12) for the specified outcome. The pivots for the four permutations shown above are as underlined: (1) ABCD, (2) BADC, (3) CABD, (4) CDBA. In each case, the underlined member is the first to complete a majority for the indicated outcome.

If all 24 permutations were depicted, one would see that the number of times each member appears as a pivot is as follows: A: 4 times, B: 4 times, C: 4 times, and D: 12 times. Thus, using the Shapley-Shubik power measure, D's power score is 12, and the power scores of each of the other members is 4. The three 'weaker' members each have the same power score—despite having different numbers of votes—because each needs at least two other members to vote the same way she does in order to constitute a minimal decisive set for victory; however, D can form a minimal decisive set with just one other member, as well as with two (see Goldman [1974] for a more detailed exposition of the Shapley-Shubik approach).

Thus, we have a principled quantification of comparative powers at least in a delimited class of cases. In principle this can be applied to questions about degrees of power inequality in political settings. However, we would need to take into account additional factors such as the cost incurred in opting for a particular outcome. How

such costs should be measured and factored into a 'net' power score will not be explored here.

Another complication must now be introduced. The Shapley-Shubik measure in effect weights all possible combinations of votes among the membership as equally possible (and/or probable). The possibility that all members vote for outcome o_3 is on a par with—hence as relevant to power scores as—the possibility that all members vote for outcome o_2 , even if no member actually votes for (or favors) o_3 . But is this philosophically defensible? If a hypothetical scenario includes options that run contrary to people's real-world preferences, are they really serious options for purposes of power calculations? Arguably not. As philosophers of modality generally agree, possible worlds very remote from the actual world need not figure in various modality-embedding statements in the same way as possible worlds close to the actual world. According to our account of power, amounts of power depend on what outcomes are obtained in various hypothetical scenarios in which each member tries to obtain various outcomes, and all scenarios are treated *on a par* as far as power-determinations are concerned. The Shapley-Shubik power measure gives equal weight to scenarios very similar to the actual world and to scenarios very far from the actual world (as judged by members' real-world preferences). This seems misguided. It is more reasonable to assign different weights to different hypothetical scenarios, where higher weights go to worlds closer to the actual one. Such a step, of course, will complicate any power measure resembling that of Shapley and Shubik. But such a step may be necessary to get an intuitively plausible power-scoring method for purposes of political theory.

8. The Problem of Representative Democracy

The next three sections address problems that might be raised for EPP and ways that techniques for measuring power might help to resolve them. This includes techniques already introduced as well as new techniques and conceptual distinctions.

The first problem is that modern democracies might fail to meet even a modest standard of equality of political power according to our present power-scoring techniques. One transparent problem is that virtually all contemporary democracies are *representative* democracies. Almost all legislative decision making (with the exception of ballot initiatives) is executed by elected representatives rather than by private citizens. It certainly looks as if those representatives should be assigned far greater political power (per person) than private citizens. Moreover, those representatives are also citizens; thus, they have the power to cast electoral votes in addition to their power to cast legislative votes. Won't there inevitably be huge inequalities of political power between representatives and private citizens? This ostensibly presents a serious challenge to the prospect for any state to qualify as a genuine (high-quality) democracy. Yet, ordinary discourse concerning many contemporary political regimes treats them as respectable democracies. This might suggest that EPP does a poor job of characterizing the essence of democracy.

There are two ways to address this problem. The first is to concede the criticism and admit that EPP stands in need of tweaking, but the tweak need not be drastic. It need not abandon the core idea behind EPP. We could simply hold that democracy does not require equality of political power at *all levels* of political power. It requires such (approximate) equality only at the *fundamental* level. By ‘fundamental level’ I mean the level of elections in which political representatives are selected. As long as private citizens have equal power with respect to electoral political activity, a system is highly democratic. This approach may be called the *equal fundamental political power* theory of democracy (EFPP). As noted above, this seems to correspond to what Schumpeter (1942) called a ‘minimalist’ conception of democracy according to which democracy is just a system in which rulers are selected by competitive elections. The afore-mentioned problem may well disappear under this new variant of EPP. Although officials will still have vastly more power than ordinary citizens at higher reaches of political decision making, power comparisons at these levels will be irrelevant to a system’s democraticness under EFPP. Only power comparisons at the fundamental level will be relevant.

A second solution to the problem would invoke a distinction between two types of power: *indirect* versus *direct* power. Here is one possible definition of—or at least a sufficient condition for—indirect power:

Power_{IND}: If X has power over whether or how Y exercises power vis-à-vis U, then X has indirect power vis-à-vis U.

Given this condition, someone who lacks direct power over an issue (e.g., voting power) can still exert power over the issue indirectly. This can hold in either of two ways. First, X might make it (very) costly for Y to cast a legislative vote for an outcome X opposes. The cost might be a refusal to support Y in the following election or a massive contribution to Y’s opponent in the next election, etc. Second, X might have great power to persuade Y to vote as X wishes. The availability of any such methods can invest private citizens with extensive indirect power over electoral issues, thereby reducing the presumptive power gap between representatives and constituents. Taking such factors into account, selected private citizens may even have more power than their own representatives. Indeed a private citizen might have the power to influence any number of elected representatives, not just his/her own representative. For example, Michael Bloomberg’s great wealth may enable him to exercise greater political power as a private citizen than he had as mayor of New York City. His ability to influence, say, gun-control legislation by means of indirect power might exceed the power he had as an elected official.

9. The Problem of Persistent Minorities; or, The Tyranny of the Majority

We turn next to the second problem for EPP mentioned above. This is the problem of ‘persistent minorities’ or the ‘tyranny of the majority’. Consider a minority

group within a large population that consistently differs in policy preferences from the dominant majority. Given this recurring majority/minority split in policy preferences, the minority always loses, the majority always wins, and similar outcomes seem inevitable for the foreseeable future. In democratic theory this situation is widely viewed as a problem of fairness, one that democracy seems incapable of resolving with its own institutional resources. I raise it here as a potential problem for EPP, because EPP seems to lack conceptual resources even to recognize this situation as a problem. Given the Shapley-Shubik power-scoring procedure as initially described, the fact that minorities regularly lose would not be deemed a source of concern to democratic theory. This is because minority citizens will not have lower political power scores than majority citizens when they are compared one to one. Since all combinations and permutations of voting patterns are treated equally under the Shapley-Shubik power-scoring rule, both majority and minority citizens will have equal power. Thus, EPP will be *insensitive* to the minority's distinctive situation.

There is probably no complete agreement among political theorists as to how much, or in what circumstances, a persistent minority phenomenon is unfair to the minority and calls for some kind of sociopolitical redress. As Thomas Christiano (2008: 290) points out, the situation of minority persistence 'may not result from any tyrannous action on the part of the majority. The majority need not deprive the minority of its right to participation or its liberal rights or even its right to an economic minimum'. True enough. But whatever stance one takes toward the proper response to citizens in a persistent minority situation, it still seems descriptively wrong to classify majority and minority citizens as having 'equal power' on a certain class of issues, in the manner implied by the Shapley-Shubik power-scoring rule. That rule, interpreted as the authors indicate, generates the result that every voter (bearing a single vote) will belong to as many minimal decisive sets as every other voter and that each will be a pivot as often as the others. This will imply voters' possession of equal power on the issues in question. And that classification, intuitively, seems misleading. A fix for this situation, however, is at hand.

Our proposed 'weighting' modification of the Shapley-Shubik measure can now be brought into the theoretical picture to rectify—or at least ameliorate—the theoretical situation. If not all combinations of preferences and votes across the electorate get equal weights, then the revised Shapley-Shubik measure will not assign equal electoral power to members of the majority and minority alike. True, there will still be many possible scenarios in which members of the (real-world) majority vote on the side of the minority, thereby enabling members of the minority to be part of a winning coalition and enabling them to count as pivots (which adds to their power score). But these possible scenarios will have reduced weight assignments under the proposed weighting modification. That is, members of the minority will no longer be assigned equal power with members of the majority. Thus, the weighted-scenario approach to power will intuitively be seen as delivering more plausible power scores, enabling the EPP analysis to diagnose the intuitive power situation more accurately. The analysis need not inflate the degree of democraticness of a political system by dint of an overly simplistic measure of

power. Obviously, the foregoing analysis does not address the question of what ought to be done in policy terms with respect to the phenomenon of persistent minorities, a question that goes beyond the scope of this article (for discussion, see Guinier 1994).

10. Conditional versus Unconditional Power

Some of the same conceptual territory covered by scenario-weighting may be covered by a new distinction between kinds of power, a distinction that may be simpler and more appealing than the former conceptual device. The distinction in question is between *conditional* and *unconditional* power.

Committee members imagined by Shapley and Shubik do not (in general) have *individual power* with respect to the issues on which they vote. If twelve votes are required to constitute a majority, none of the members A, B, C, and D (in the earlier example) can single-handedly secure a majority, at least if we make no assumptions about how the other members will vote. But members A, B, C, and D do have some kind of power each. They can each obtain their preferred outcome *if* an appropriate number of others have matching preferences and vote accordingly. What shall we call this kind of power? An obvious label is *conditional power*, where this means power conditional on *other people's* decisions. Suppose a yes-no vote will be taken on a certain proposition and Sidney wants it to pass. More than enough other members, however, are opposed to its passage, and they can't be simply bought off. The proposition is destined for defeat (whether or not the vote has been taken at the time we are speaking). How should we characterize Sidney's situation? We can characterize it as a conditional ability to obtain a favorable outcome because *if* enough other members *had* voted, or *were* to vote, in favor (even though they *in fact* vote in opposition), Sidney's positive vote would result in success for his cause. Each of the other members of the committee is similarly positioned. Each has conditional power with respect to this outcome, no matter what their actual situations may be. Notice this would not hold of most people in the world. Only people whose committee membership confers voting rights on them would possess this conditional power. (Here I leave indirect power out of the story.) So it is by no means a vacuous situation to be in. But it's also a good distance from actually 'getting one's way'.

To make sure this is understood, contrast Sidney's situation with that of his brother Rodney. Rodney is also a committee member and has one or more votes. But Rodney, unlike Sidney, is a clever and charismatic speaker. He is capable of convincing anybody of almost anything if you give him twenty minutes of uninterrupted time (which, we may suppose, is available to each committee member). Now Rodney, unlike Sidney, is opposed to the proposition. But if he were in favor of it, he could sway all the opponents to his side. If he preferred and tried to get that outcome, he would succeed. And if he tried to get the negative outcome (which he does, merely by remaining silent), he would succeed in getting that preferred outcome (as he does). So Rodney has *individual power* vis-à-vis this

issue, or what we will call *unconditional power*. He is able to obtain either of the two outcomes. Not so for Sidney who possesses only conditional power with respect to the issue.

As we go through life, we often don't know whether the power we hope to have with respect to a given issue is merely conditional or unconditional. If a certain result depends on what others prefer or decide, and you don't know what their attitudes are, you may not know whether or not you can obtain the result. You may realize that you have at least conditional power to obtain it; that is, if enough other people favor it, then your pitching in would surely secure the result. So your conditional power to get it is assured. But you would like more than merely conditional power; you would like unconditional power. And that depends on the actual preferences and undertakings that other people have executed or will execute.

In general, people reasonably prefer to have as much unconditional power as they can muster vis-à-vis a wide swath of issues; the more the merrier, *ceteris paribus*. But for almost all of us, not all of our conditional powers turn out to be unconditional powers as well. A certain portion of the time, other people whose cooperation is required to obtain a desired outcome just don't cooperate. They don't make the choices that position *us* to get the outcome we hope or expect to bring about with their cooperation.

As it is in life generally, so it is in politics. There are situations where one group of people lack (unconditional) power with respect to issues they care about because another group doesn't cooperate. The first group still has conditional power, but this isn't worth much in the circumstances. It is often difficult to say what people are entitled to. The problem of persistent minorities can be viewed in this light. Minority members often have conditional power but lack unconditional power. This is an alternate way of describing the problem of persistent minorities, but it has already been discussed enough above, so I won't revisit it.

II. 'Total' Power and 'Political' Power

Two remaining issues concerning EPP need additional clarification. To this point our discussion of power comparisons has highlighted questions concerning *single* issues. But EPP presumably alludes to comparisons of *total* political power. When EPP says that a high level of democracy implies a high level of equality of political power, it presumably means that pairwise comparisons of citizens in respect of their total (political) power (on average) ranks them as quite close. If so, the question of how to conceptualize 'total power' rears its head.

One might suppose, initially, that someone's total political power is the 'sum' of that person's political powers vis-à-vis each of the issues taken independently for which that person has positive (i.e., nonzero) power. It cannot reasonably be expected, however, that someone with positive power vis-à-vis 100 issues will have the sum of those powers (or even the same power) with respect to a *conjunction* of these issues. Exercising power with respect to an issue typically requires effort

that depletes some of one's resources, especially money. In light of the problem of resource depletion, total power cannot be the result of simply adding up all of one's powers with respect to each issue taken singly. We need to develop an account of total power that takes account of resource depletion. Devising such an account is certainly imaginable, but hardly trivial. Nonetheless, it is a crucial topic that needs attention; anyone interested in polishing or refining the EPP approach is invited to pursue it.

Next we must say something about what *political* power consists in. According to EPP, democraticness does not vary with a system's degree of power equality in all domains. It only varies with power equality in political matters (here EPP diverges from Kolodny's [2014b] otherwise similar approach). What does this mean? Systems of government at every level address a wide range of questions or issues. Only those kinds of issues are political ones, and political power comparisons should only be made by reference to them, using power measures of the kinds presented above (or better measures, should new ones be devised). This explanation leaves a large residue of vagueness, but the subject matter does not readily lend itself to precision. Indeed, among many other questions, the tricky one of whether overall power comparisons should incorporate both conditional and unconditional powers—and if so, how they should be weighted relative to each other—lies beyond the scope of this article.

A final point relevant to the analysis of democraticness concerns the adequacy of the basic EPP formula. In giving greater quantitative shape to the notion of power, it is natural to think of positive power, zero (or null) power, and (perhaps) negative power. Focus now on zero power. Suppose that almost all ordinary citizens in a given polity have zero or close to zero (total) political power. Then they are approximately equal in political power, and EPP seems bound to declare the polity substantially democratic. Is that intuitively right? It seems not. Here is an elaboration of the case. Suppose all decisions in this polity are made by an exceedingly inept dictator, who only occasionally achieves the outcomes he tries to obtain. He is often, we might say, *inversely* powerful or has *negative* power. In Pettit's (2012) terminology, the dictator has a huge amount of 'influence' in the sense of ability to causally affect what transpires in these domains. But he commonly lacks *control*, because the 'directionality' of his influence regularly goes awry. Thus, his net total political power hovers near zero. When comparing this dictator's total power with that of his impotent subjects, it's a wash; their respective total power is fairly equal. Does this imply that the polity is substantially democratic? Certainly not! But in its present formulation, this is what EPP implies.

The same problem potentially arises when we consider the possibility of political decisions made by lot or lottery. The practice of decision making by lot is attracting considerable attention in political theory circles. Alexander Guerrero (forthcoming) calls regimes of this sort 'lottocracies'. A lottocratic system is one in which most people have roughly zero power (at least over the issues settled by lot). But this seems to satisfy EPP as formulated. To address this problem, EPP theorists need to tweak the EPP formula at least slightly. The theory cannot allow equality of merely *nonnegative* power to qualify a regime as democratic. Only a fairly high level of

equal *positive* political power should suffice to reach a high grade of democracy. This would yield something like the following new principle:

(EPPP) A political system's degree of democraticness varies with the extent to which its citizens' total amounts of political power are (1) positive and (2) substantially equal (considered pairwise).

12. What about Epistemic and Deliberative Approaches to Democracy?

Our single-minded focus on power equality as the kernel of democracy may be met with resistance by proponents of other popular approaches to democratic theory. Champions of an epistemic approach might complain about the limited attention accorded to epistemic factors,³ and deliberative democrats will rue the neglect of public deliberation as an essential democratic desideratum. How do I defend my neglect of these ingredients in the proffered account of democracy?

A central theme of the epistemic approach is the claim that democracy excels in being *smart* or *intelligent*: its procedures for the formation of collective opinion are particularly effective at getting at the truth. (Landemore, for example, claims that 'democracy is simply a smarter regime than the rest' [2013: 7].) One impetus for this approach is the Condorcet Jury Theorem (Condorcet 1785). This theorem states that when a group's judgments are determined democratically—that is, by majority rule—then if its members are sufficiently competent, the group's reliability (truth-getting propensity) will exceed that of any individual member and will approach one as the group size increases.⁴ Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that states or polities do well when they are good at truth-getting, either because this helps them achieve the common good or because it helps them achieve other desired ends.

These considerations certainly pinpoint features of democracy that might tend to make it *valuable*. But the principal project in this paper, as emphasized in section 1, is not to say what is *good* or *valuable* about democracy (though this will be addressed, albeit briefly, in section 13). Instead, our main project is to figure out what is *constitutive* of democracy or of degrees of democraticness. It is far from clear that being highly reliable is constitutive of democracy. It is true that when voters in a group (either all or a sufficient number of them) are each reliable to a degree greater than .50, then the group as a whole (using majority rule) will have an even higher reliability than the individual members. But it is also true that when each member is reliable to a degree less than .50, the group as a whole (using

³ Readers should recall, however, that the present account of power assigns an important role to epistemic factors insofar as knowledge serves as a critical *resource* for power vis-à-vis many issues (see section 6). I develop a somewhat analogous role for knowledge in a previous treatment, in *Knowledge in a Social World* (Goldman 1999b: ch. 10, 'Democracy').

⁴ See List and Pettit (2011: 89). In addition to the assumption of voter competence, the theorem assumes the satisfaction of two other conditions: that the issue being decided offers two options, of which one is objectively correct, and that citizens' votes are mutually independent of one another.

majority rule) will have an even *lower* reliability than the individual members, and its reliability will approach *zero* as the group size increases. This is the ‘reverse’ form of the Condorcet Jury Theorem (see List and Pettit 2011: 98). Given that the reverse form of the CJT is as much a theorem as the standard form of CJT and that each group uses a democratic procedure (i.e., majority rule), one cannot say that high reliability is *constitutive* of democracy. It’s a mistake to say that majority rule invariably promotes accurate judgment. It does so only ‘half the time’ (assuming that voter competence is no more common than voter incompetence).

Of course, epistemic democrats do not appeal exclusively to CJT when touting democracy’s (alleged) conduciveness to epistemic ends. Another popular appeal is to diversity. For example, Lu Hong and Scott Page (Hong and Page 2001; Page 2007) claim to have evidence supporting the epistemic value of diversity in problem solving, especially regarding the *cognitive* diversity of problem solvers. However, it’s not entirely clear how democracy enters the picture once the cognitive restriction is introduced. If only cognitive diversity improves a group’s problem solving, the type of inclusiveness relevant to epistemic ends seems to have little connection with democratic principles or desiderata.

Another feature of political regimes said to be essential to democracy is public deliberation, where deliberation is the mutual exchange of reasons for or against proposed laws or policies. Only when citizens justify their views to one another via free and fair deliberation do their resulting decisions have political *legitimacy* or *authority*. A system is truly democratic only if it embeds such a practice of political deliberation. Deliberative democrats would undoubtedly contend that EPP’s silence on the role of deliberation is a serious omission when aiming to account for democracy’s value and legitimating function.⁵

To repeat, however, this essay’s (principal) project is not to elucidate the grounds of democracy’s value or legitimating capacity. Instead, we seek to identify the meaning of ‘democracy’ or ‘democratic’, and we pursue this quest by asking what fixes or grounds a state’s degree of democraticness. How will deliberative democrats address this question from their vantage point? Presumably they will say that a polity’s degree of democraticness varies with the amount and/or quality of its public deliberation. But it is doubtful that deliberation has such a role in fixing, or grounding, democraticness. Imagine a pair of very similar nation states that differ primarily in terms of their opportunities for communication. The advanced technology of the first state makes it easy for citizens to communicate extensively with others, essentially at no cost. They can easily offer one another full-throated reasons for their political views, and they do so. The second state is greatly disadvantaged in communication opportunities, partly because of geographical dispersion—they have a small and highly dispersed population—and partly because of technological deprivation. The best they can do in political matters is to circulate

⁵ There are innumerable varieties of deliberative democratic theories. Leading examples include Rawls (1993), Cohen (1997, 1998), and Gutmann and Thompson (1996). For a good overview, see Freeman (2000). For influential monographs and collections of articles, see Habermas (1996), Estlund (2008), Bohman and Rehg (1997), and Macedo (1999). A practical proposal for enhancing deliberation in the interest of democracy is Ackerman and Fishkin (2004).

briefly stated proposals in a publicly conveyed fashion so that all citizens can cast a vote on them, but there is no prior interpersonal debate or discussion. I would agree that the first state is (politically) better off than the second state. But is the first state more democratic than the second? To my mind, nothing in our description guarantees this. However valuable it may be for a political system to encourage political deliberation, this activity is not a necessary element for democracy. It is certainly possible to be *somewhat* democratic without engaging in public deliberation, and it may even be possible for the second state of our example to be *as* democratic as the first. (This would depend on how the story is filled out.) In either case, it is perfectly appropriate to omit the deliberation element when offering a conceptual analysis of democraticness.

To be clear, I don't mean to deny that public deliberation can make positive *causal* contributions to successful government. The question here, however, is whether public deliberation is (partly) *constitutive* of democracy. This is what my two-states example is meant to raise doubts about.

13. Democracy's Raison D'Etire

In answering the question 'What is democracy?' I have suggested that democraticness comes in degrees and that higher levels of democraticness are associated with greater equality of (positive) political power. A regime's being democratic, then, consists in its being on a high rung of the scale of power equality. If we accept this analysis of what is conveyed by the term 'democratic', an obvious follow-up question ensues: what is so good about a regime being on a high rung? Or, more cautiously, why might it strike so many people as good? Democracy clearly enjoys great worldwide appeal, however weakly or robustly it is instantiated. How should this appeal be understood and explained? Remember, I do not claim that democraticness is the only value in the political realm. Nor do I claim that maximizing democraticness yields a maximum of political value, legitimacy, or justice. Still, we can inquire into the reasons that would lead reasonable people to plump for a strong dose of democracy in their political systems. So the *raison d'etre* sought here is less ambitious than the rationalizing targets that most philosophers of democracy choose to address.

A possible answer I will sketch (very briefly) is a consequentialist one, though it can also be framed in a rather Rawlsian (1971), original position, mode. Suppose you are considering what kind of government you would like to have. Without trying to specify the laws it would adopt, you might consider what decision-making structures and procedures this government would feature and what these would imply in terms of the distribution of political power among citizens. Next think about what alternative systems might portend in terms of your personal prospects for satisfaction of your interests or preferences—without yet knowing what particular interests you might develop down the road (a familiar Rawlsian veil of ignorance).

Here we can plug in some earlier points about agents' powers or abilities to obtain preferred outcomes. (Here comes the consequentialist deliberation.) If a person is superconfident of having individual (unconditional) powers in her possession, so she can obtain her most strongly preferred outcomes come what may (even in the face of others' resistance), she might be indifferent to governmental decisions. But if, like most of us, she is not so sure, she might favor governmental procedures that would not seriously disadvantage her. If she expects to become a dictator, she might feel no need for a government in which power is (more-or-less) distributed equally. But most people prefer the prospect of having a say, i.e., having some power—at least *conditional* power—in choosing and exerting power over both elected officials and the statutes and practices they adopt. This amounts to having a serious degree of equality of political power. An individual may be prepared to accept a relatively modest amount of unconditional power as long as his or her conditional power is not predetermined to be valueless because of others' actual preferences. A preference for substantial power equality might be regarded as a maximin approach to the choice of a political structure. This is a realistic rendering of how many people might approach the matter. Hence, it might be *their* rationale for leaning toward a highly democratic political regime.⁶

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⁶ Although there is a definite Rawlsian flavor to this picture, it does not lead to specific principles of the kind Rawls himself 'deduced' from the original position. Nor is it presented as a theory of justice. I make no claims about the justness of democracy.

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