2 *Models of Democracy* Part One: 'Classic Models'

2.1 What you should be able to do by the end of Part One

1. **Recognize what is distinctive about each model, and be able to appraise and compare models 1–4.**
2. **Give an objective account of some central points made by the major theorists discussed, in their historical context.**
3. **Begin to have a sense of the development of democratic political theory as a set of debates.**
4. **Begin to reflect on your own assumptions and values in relation to democracy.**
5. **Make some useful notes on each chapter for future reference.**

2.2 Chapter 1, 'Classical Democracy: Athens'

Having explained his aims and methods, Held sets off on his historical tour of classical models by examining the constitution of ancient Athens. He explains the (to our eyes) extraordinary level of direct *participation* in public affairs by the citizens and the value system which commended this. He points at once to a major paradox. On the one hand, aspects of classical Athenian democracy were regarded as 'truly radical' by later writers, including Marx, and the *idea* of Athenian democracy has run down through the ages, and indeed been a source of inspiration to later democrats. On the other hand, the *reality* of Athenian democracy is that it was (a) undemocratic to modern eyes, in that only a small proportion of all the adults in Athens were entitled to vote, and (b) unstable, at least in the sense that policy making depended on the unpredictable outcomes of public debate.

Held interweaves two more themes into his discussion. The first theme is the immense historical debate on the practical problems of running a democracy on the Athenian model, or anything like it. Held reminds us that those who celebrated the Athenian model were greatly outweighed by the critics who thought democracy inherently unstable and morally debilitating. The second theme raises the questions: 'In what social and economic circumstances did this famous model of government arise?' 'What were the necessary conditions for it to flourish?' 'And was the demise of Athens due to the changing of these conditions, or did it collapse under the weight of its own impracticalities and contradictions?' In his discussion of the demise of Athenian

democracy, Held trails, but does not expand on, two extremely important considerations. The first is that the capacity to wage war successfully may play a crucial role in the rise and fall of particular states. And the second is that the political *form* of the state may be relevant here: there is a suggestion that democracies in the ancient world may have been less efficient war-fighting machines than the autocracies by which they were vanquished. Ancient democracy almost looks like a luxury, or perhaps an illusion!

In his discussion of the critics of Athenian democracy, Held introduces (a) the theoretical search, in Plato's writings, for arguments to justify minority rule by the wise; (b) the practical search for modifications to pure democratic forms – constitutional safeguards against the excesses and instability of popular rule; and (c) writing on the desirability of 'mixed' or balanced systems designed to make modified forms of democracy workable.

ACTIVITY

After reading chapter 1, see if you can answer the following questions. If not, check back over the text and make yourself some summary notes.

1. **What were the main operating features of Athenian democracy?**
2. **What were Plato's main arguments against democracy as a form of government?**
3. **Why is it paradoxical to call Athens democratic?**
4. **What was it about Athens which has inspired democrats through the ages?**

Careful reading will unpack questions 1 and 2 for you. Questions 3 and 4 are related. One might well scratch one's head about the centuries-long celebration of a type of constitution which was criticized in theory, and unstable in practice. One conclusion which seems inescapable is that, whatever the historical facts, the power of ideas and even myths can be considerable. Moreover, the rise and fall of certain ideas, their popularity, decline and recovery, can be intimately connected with the *ideological* function they are able to serve for each generation. Nevertheless, perhaps one (personal) answer to question 4 lies in the realization, given certain conditions, of a level of direct participation and practical equality, a principled commitment to solve public questions through open debate, and a notion of virtue and personal fulfilment

through citizenship, which is capable of making us a bit ashamed of our private and materialistic aims in a consumer society.

2.3 Chapter 2, 'Republicanism: Liberty, Self-Government and the Active Citizen'

Chapter 2 falls into three main parts. In the first three pages Held sketches how the Athenian conception of the active citizen went 'underground' for several centuries, as the advent of Christianity ushered in the belief that worldly political arrangements should reflect, not the majority opinion of citizens arrived at after rational debate, but the will of God. Accompanying this was the banishment of the notion of equality from political debate, with the spiritual compensation that individuals were, however, equal in the sight of God.

In pages 32–6 Held charts the historical return of the idea of active citizenship in the Italian city-republics of the Renaissance, and then traces different components of the idea of republicanism in the writings of Marsilius of Padua (pp. 36–40), Niccolò Machiavelli (pp. 40–3) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (pp. 43–9). Finally, he turns to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft at the end of the eighteenth century (pp. 49–54), who for almost the first time argued for the equality of women in the claim to democratic citizenship.

Chapter 2 delivers our second model of democracy – republicanism – which occurs in two important variations:

Model IIa Protective Republicanism – where a framework for self-rule for citizens is justified as a protection for individuals from oppressive rule by kings (or 'princes') or small minorities. In other words, democratic participation has *instrumental* importance (p. 44).

Model IIb Developmental Republicanism – where the justification of citizenship is based on the benefits of participation as a means of self-expression and self-development. In other words, democratic participation has *intrinsic* value (p. 48).

Again we notice that the political arrangements of, in many cases, short-lived states, and the political ideas of some relatively unsung political theorists (Machiavelli and Rousseau are of course great names in the history of political thought) are unpacked by Held for the elements they contribute to his second significant model of democracy.

ACTIVITY

To see what those elements are, have a look at the outlines of protective and developmental republicanism on pp. 44 and 48 and compare them with the map of model I on p. 27. What similarities and differences do you notice?

I noticed many continuities from the Athenian to the republican models:

1. As in Athens, but unlike the regimes and assumptions of the intervening centuries, the republicans rejected 'the prevailing assumption that government must be regarded as a God-given form of lordship' (Skinner, quoted by Held on p. 32).
2. Citizenship is still restricted; criteria include gender, age, property, place of birth and whether free-born or slave.
3. The core of the republican position is self-determination and popular sovereignty – 'a form of direct democracy among trusted "club members"' (p. 39).
4. Again we find a conception of virtue stressing public spirit and the setting of the common good above private interests.
5. 'To be a democrat in that era', Held writes, 'was simply to conceive of political participation in broader terms than just the involvement of the wealthy or noble in public affairs.' Again this represents a democratic paradox, or contradiction, to modern eyes.
6. The envisaged scale of political communities is still *small*.
7. There is continuing debate about the centrality of the link between democracy, or at least political participation by citizens, and freedom.
8. Both models stress the rule of law.

Some differences I picked up were:

(a) There is perhaps, in protective republicanism especially, a more strongly marked attempt to link certain kinds of constitution or political arrangement with the

achievement of civic welfare, glory and, usually, successful expansion through war.

(b) There is a greater emphasis on the study of the rise and fall of particular systems – what were the preconditions for their emergence, what conditions were necessary for them to flourish, and what were the seeds of their decay? In the case of Machiavelli, this analysis is accompanied by some sense that self-governance was less suitable for some phases of a nation's developments, particularly those requiring firm and concerted action in warfare.

(c) A third thing coming through more strongly for me is the close examination of how to run 'mixed' forms of government, partly in order to incorporate social factions whose exclusion could lead directly to the political instability which was a chronic feature of the age. This seems to me a very modern notion of politics – a secular affair, in which men of property devise mechanisms to incorporate or reconcile diverse social interests.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 43–9 on Rousseau, then see if you can write down short answers to the following:

- **What, according to Rousseau, was the relation between economic equality and justice?**
- **Where, according to Rousseau, did sovereignty reside, and how was it exercised?**
- **What were the significant features of Rousseau's account of 'assembly politics'?**
- **Where do the problems arise in this account of the difference between liberty and independence?**

It seems to me that Rousseau's political ideas, as set out on pages 43–9, are both ancient and modern. They are ancient in that he envisages and values the direct democratic participation by citizens in public affairs, and thus draws up a constitution possible only for small communities. His model, though not extending to large states, is modern in giving some thought to the problem of dividing and limiting government power. And, although he does not argue for the extension of the vote to all adults, he

does reduce the property qualification and thus extend citizenship, as well as thinking about how inequalities in wealth damaged and corrupted the kind of ethical democracy he admired most.

ACTIVITY

Read the pages on Mary Wollstonecraft (49–54). Then attempt to answer the following:

- **In what sense do you feel that her work 'sheds new light on the strengths and limitations of the traditions of thought discussed so far' (p. 50)?**
- **What does it mean to say that hers is 'a central contribution to the analysis of the conditions for the possibility of democracy' (p. 50)?**

Several things strike me in this account of Wollstonecraft. The first is the way she appears to come into the subject through the discussion of reason, asserting that women possess it just as men do, and are as capable of understanding the world and exercising sound judgement in political affairs. A second is the links she makes between patriarchy and inequalities in society as equally damaging, and her striking reminder that luxury and idleness can be as enfeebling to the rational intellect as poverty and grinding manual labour. A third is her attention to how social roles are moulded, by custom and what we would now call ideology (a word invented at about the time Mary Wollstonecraft was writing). A fourth, as Held notes on page 52, is her linking of matters in the public sphere with the ordering and disposition of those in the private sphere, in a new way. Finally, one cannot help but admire the combination of such indignation about present circumstances with such optimism about what human beings and society could be like, if only unjustifiable inequalities were to be swept away; if only people lived and politics was conducted more in accordance with the dictates of reason itself.

ACTIVITY

On pp. 53–4 Held discusses the importance of Wollstonecraft, the neglect of her work for many decades, and the problems and internal contradictions of the work itself. What do you think of the critical points he makes? What unanalysed values or assumptions are you bringing to your own judgement?

NB On pages 54–5 Held has some valuable concluding reflections, linking republicanism with the chapters to come. They are worth careful study.

2.4 Chapter 3, 'The Development of Liberal Democracy: For and Against the State'

Chapter 3 is huge – some forty pages long – so I propose to deal with it in four parts: I know that it can be tedious switching back and forth from book to study guide, but it breaks naturally into study sections, as follows:

pp. 56–65 Hobbes and Locke
pp. 65–75 Montesquieu and Madison
pp. 75–9 Bentham and James Mill
pp. 79–95 John Stuart Mill

Now, there is a lot of detail here, but Held sets it out with great clarity. What he is actually doing is furnishing you, in about forty pages, with knowledge of the essential texts on the birth of liberalism and its transition to liberal democracy. Why is this important? Because liberalism is everywhere in Western political culture: it is in the air we breathe. Accordingly it is vital to achieve some understanding of it, if only to know ourselves, our institutions and the assumptions which underlie them. And since for us liberal democracy is the central political form of modernity – of our advanced, urbanized, industrialized, technological, capitalist, progressively more secular society – that gives us the basic vocabulary with which people have explained, justified and criticized our own political arrangements.

For me this is a very exciting chapter, because this is where some of the giants of political theory stride onto the stage. In the writings of Hobbes and Locke there appears for the first time in political thought the notion of the sovereign individual, conceived as existing prior to organized society, and indeed capable of fashioning organized government to his will and his needs. The medieval worldview of a static hierarchy of ranks and orders, the 'great chain of being' ordained by God, was exploded for ever. Hobbes talks in a distinctive modern voice, and we recognize the

restless, competitive, acquisitive individual he describes in ourselves. Locke, Montesquieu and Madison each contributed elements of our modern understanding, by describing the recognizable features of our current political structures which were coming into being around them, by analysing what democracy was and could be in these new conditions, and by asking a set of questions which still have to be answered by any modern political theory.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 56–65 on Hobbes and Locke, then make brief notes on these questions:

- **What were the significant differences between Hobbes and Locke on (a) the state of nature, and (b) the social contract?**
- **What features of modern liberalism can be found in Locke, and how far could he be called a democrat?**

A Note on Theory

Where do political theories come from? One important answer is that they are often produced in times of social and political crisis, when existing political institutions and values are under threat, and urgent new questions arise. And one of the most important things to do when you are comparing political theories, which are in a sense *answers*, is to be clear exactly which *questions* those theorists were addressing.

Here's how this applies to Hobbes and Locke. Thinking about the relation of a political theory to the social conditions in which it was produced, it is instructive to notice that Hobbes was writing when the experience of the Civil War was still fresh in the minds of Englishmen. In a sense he is asking the question: 'How is order possible?' and his answer – that we must avoid the state of nature in which it is 'the warre of all against all', and give up powers, rights and liberties to a Leviathan strong enough to protect us – makes sense in terms of that. But Locke was writing at the end of the seventeenth century, when a confident England had cut off the head of one king and chosen another. He asks a different question: 'How can arbitrary power be restrained?' And the answer he gives – by making the contract setting up the government *conditional*, and retaining the right to change it if it displeases us – makes sense in that context too.

Hobbes memorably describes the conditions of man in the state of nature – fearful of robbery and murder in a wholly lawless land – as 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short'. But for Locke the state of nature turns out to be a much more agreeable place: recognition of the law of nature and a duty to God, basic principles of morality, natural rights including life, liberty and property, and so on. Only certain 'inconveniences' impel men to get together and contract to set up a government, of a limited and provisional kind. Accordingly, Locke's residents strike a better bargain, so to speak, when they contract to set up a government! As Held shows, membership in Locke's new political community gives men not just responsibilities, duties and constraints, but rights, powers and liberties (p. 64).

In Locke's fundamental account of constitutional government based upon the consent of its citizens we begin to recognize the outline, the flavour, of our own political world. In Montesquieu further recognizable modern elements appear: the mixed and balanced constitution, and the division of power between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 65–70 on Montesquieu. How does Montesquieu suggest that states can reconcile private interests, the public good, and liberty?

NB On page 70 Held summarizes usefully where the argument on protective democracy is going, and the significance of his move on to the ideas of Madison, Bentham and James Mill. It is interesting to find both Montesquieu and Madison explicitly discussing the classical democracy of small political communities and city-states, and joining with Plato in analysing its shortcomings, before turning to the question of how some related vision of freedom, citizenship and indeed public virtue could be given effect in states incomparably larger and more complex.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 70–5 on Madison. What was Madison's solution to 'the problem of faction', and in what sense can we say that his notion of a constitution for an extended territory and a large population was democratic?

In Madison we find a pessimistic picture of human nature in which reason and passion combine to propel the pursuit of self-interest. The business of the political theorist seems to be to devise institutions which can somehow harness or convert such ambition into good and effective government, and in which 'power is so distributed and organized that whoever is tempted to abuse it finds legal restraints in his way' (Plamenatz, quoted by Held on p. 69). It is striking that Madison thinks 'faction' the main problem in politics, and that he sees 'inequality of property' as perhaps the single biggest reason why people form themselves into factions to advance their interests; but that this does *not* lead him in an egalitarian direction; instead he thinks that a degree of inequality is inevitable, and he concentrates on building a governmental machine which will control its *effects* (p. 74). Note, however, that the political machinery he recommends goes some way towards making possible an element of public virtue, in that the large representative legislatures he envisages would be vehicles for 'serious deliberation and effective decision-making in public life' (p. 74).

So several important things are happening in Madison's thought as outlined here. First, we are moving beyond the assumption that democracy can only function in small communities, to a novel series of arguments that scale can be an advantage in modern democratic politics. Secondly, we see the model of a mixed constitution elaborated into something like a recognizably modern shape, giving plausible answers to Hobbes's question about how government and order are to be sustained, Locke's question about how arbitrary power is to be controlled, and Madison's own pressing question about how the inevitable interplay of what we would now call parties and pressure groups can be regulated or channelled for the public good. Finally, weaving in and out of this argument are assumptions about the equality of citizens at one level and their inequality in others. For the radically egalitarian notion of democracy Madison's ideas are ambiguous indeed.

A Note on Theory

What is by now abundantly clear is that any theory about the reality or character of democracy in the modern world must move beyond the relative simplicities of Rousseau's model to engage with the complex institutional arrangements consequent upon the *size* of modern states, the complexity of their social and economic development, and the ideas, or ideologies, by which their political systems are justified.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 75–9 on Jeremy Bentham and James Mill.

In a few pages, Held sketches utilitarianism and its connection to market economics in the works of Bentham and James Mill. Their ideas have been described as 'a founding model of democracy for a modern industrial society' (Macpherson, quoted by Held on p. 77), while Held also notes that with these arguments 'the protective theory of democracy received its clearest explication' (p. 75). This is because the whole understanding of human nature and the whole picture of human beings in society we are presented with here is quintessentially *liberal.*

The Hobbesian figure of the restless, competitive, interest-pursuing individual, motivated to pursue pleasure or utility, and avoid pain, is again before us. The free movement, interaction and competition of citizens in civil society are considered paramount. They must be protected, not simply from state oppression, but from unnecessary interference of any kind. This requires a fairly minimalist government, accountable at regular elections, and confined to securing the framework within which largely self-organizing and self-regulating citizens can go about their business.

ACTIVITY

- **What were the features and mechanisms of government which Bentham and James Mill thought essential for democratic government?**
- **Apart from upholding the principle of utility, what were the 'subsidiary' goals of government?**

Three features of this picture of society need emphasis. The first is that the legitimate scope of the political is drawn very small – to set the natural energy of people free. Progress and freedom are associated with the removal of traditional authority and almost all the religious, social and economic controls of feudalism. The second feature follows from this: unlike conservatives, liberals are very sanguine, very optimistic, about the consequences, the direction of events, likely to be produced by this relatively unregulated economic free-for-all. In short, they believed in progress, and they did *not* believe that it was the role of government to act purposively, to lead and intervene, to bring it about (although they did believe, as Held notes, that government intervention in society was justified under certain circumstances). Finally, Held emphasizes that in their view democracy became a *means* for bringing about the successful pursuit of individual ends in what we would now call a mass consumer society, and not a means of public participation, self expression and self-development for the citizen. We have a rather one-dimensional figure often characterized as 'economic man'. You see why this model is the last word in *protective* rather than developmental democracy. And note Held's crisp verdict on it: 'a very partial or one-sided form of democratic theory'.

ACTIVITY

Look now at model IIIa p. 78. What are its most important differences from the model of protective republicanism on p. 44?

The liberal ideas on which the classic model of protective democracy was based contained within themselves, however, an egalitarian thrust – assumptions capable of being turned against the economic inequalities and the patriarchal assumptions of the liberal order as it manifested itself in nineteenth-century England. In this transition from early liberal to more modern liberal *democratic* ideas and institutions, the figure of John Stuart Mill was central. I myself admire Mill for a number of reasons, of which the first is that when I read him I recognized a number of principles in which I myself believed, more or less unselfconsciously (aha! I hear you say: a glimpse of where Bram Gieben is coming from). The second is that Mill can sustain a single sentence over a whole page without ever wearying the reader, such is the clarity and elegance of his style. (I have seen several students boldly attempt this feat, but they always fail horrendously. For those of you without Mill's powers I recommend instead the time-

honoured advice: never use a long word or a long sentence where a shorter one will do.) Actually, reading Mill for style teaches two lessons: that clarity in writing probably depends upon clarity in thought, and that the use of English punctuation is a great art, in which few of us excel.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 79–95 on John Stuart Mill. Jot down what seem to you to be the main points.

Here are my notes. In John Stuart Mill we find:

1. A classic discussion of the meaning of liberty for citizens of the modern state.
2. A principled argument against absolute power and despotism of all kinds, including from an oppressive majority or an overactive bureaucratic state.
3. A statement of the importance of individual participation in public affairs, both for the self-development of the individual, and for the overall good of society.
4. A willingness to extend the vote to the great mass of people, while retaining additional or plural votes for the more intelligent and cultivated, at least until such time as the masses had reached a sufficient level of education.
5. A plan for combining a vigorous legislative body with a skilled professional executive body of civil servants.
6. A general commitment to *laissez-faire* economics, modified, as he got older, with arguments for more state intervention to ensure the provision of certain public goods, such as education.
7. One of the earliest and greatest arguments for equal rights for women, and for 'the impossibility of the realization of human happiness, freedom and democracy, while the inequality of the sexes persisted' (Held p. 89).

On pages 91–3 Held analyses Mill's philosophy and in particular the fact that 'he stopped far short of a commitment to political and social equality' (p. 92). He emphasizes however, that in his final writings Mill moved further away from any rigid adherence to *laissez-faire*, took the fact and the consequences of economic inequality more seriously, and produced ideas capable of being interpreted as justifying much

more state intervention to bring about reform – one of the earliest expositions of the principles of social democratic politics, the welfare state, and the mixed economy.

ACTIVITY

- **What were the principal differences between Mill's views (model IIIb) and the protective model (IIIa)?**
- **What do you think of Held's account of the 'shortcomings' of Mill's ideas?**

NB Held's 'Summary remarks' (pp. 93–5) give a useful short summary of the theory of representative liberal democracy, and of the slow historical process by which actual democracies moved towards universal suffrage 'and the idea that the rights of citizenship should apply equally to all adults' (p. 94). At the foot of page 94 Held defines liberal democracy in its distinctively contemporary form – this is a very useful list – why not see if you can jot down its key features now, before turning back to the book to check your list against Held's?

2.5 Chapter 4, 'Direct Democracy and the End of Politics'

There is no in point beating about the bush: in places this chapter is pretty dense. It offers a summary account of Marxist ideas, focusing in particular on his views of the state and its relation to social classes (pp. 103–8); it gradually unfolds Marx's analysis and sharp criticism of liberal democracy, in theory and in practice; it looks at a model of state and society advocated by Marx and exemplified in the short-lived Paris Commune (pp. 108–16); offers a brief account of three contemporary schools or variations of Marxism (pp. 116–19); and concludes with some critical reflections on Marx's central ideas (pp. 119–22). We are introduced to some new theoretical language in this chapter, but don't be put off by this: the essential ideas are quite accessible. Notice that Held provides some helpful tables and diagrams for you to illustrate and clarify points made in the text (for example his table setting out the difference between the forces of production and the relations of production on p. 100). You don't have to remember all of these, though some are very interesting: have a look at the table comparing socialism and communism, for example (p. 112).

Why read Marx now? Well, the last chapter was important because it ushered in the central ideas of liberal democracy – the most widespread and significant political form in the world today – including its claims to offer formal equality, freedom and security to its citizens, on the basis of a particular conception of the state and its relation to civil society. Marxism is important because it offers the most devastating critique of liberal democracy, based upon a contrasting account of human nature, the nature of power, the relation between the economy and politics, and the validity of liberal democratic claims to provide citizens with a meaningful degree of freedom, equality and justice. It is a wholly distinct attempt to think through the meaning of these concepts, first under capitalism, and then under a socialist and communist organization of society. Until quite recently, almost half the world's population lived under governments which claimed allegiance to some form of Marxist doctrine. Even now, the debate between some form of liberal democracy and some form of socialism remains central to politics. (Although, as you will see in chapter 8, some now argue that with the fall of communist regimes in Europe, liberal democracy has, *de facto*, won that historic argument. We will examine that idea later.)

Before you turn to the chapter, an important caveat. Throughout this book we have been looking at political ideas which have often been exemplified, if only imperfectly, in actual historical states. It can be hard to separate out theoretical arguments, and criticisms of them, from our knowledge of what became of particular states in practice. There is a temptation here to say that if a particular state is short-lived, the principles on which it was based must be faulty somewhere. That is what Plato, for example, said about Athenian democracy. This needs great care. The demise of the Soviet form of socialism, reflecting a thousand contingent historical circumstances, is not a refutation of Marx's analysis of capitalism, even if the history of the USSR is an instructive counterpoint to Marx's account of how states might evolve towards the final goal of communism. Marx had his own vision of what equality, freedom, citizenship and the fulfilment of human potential could mean, and the political and economic structures which alone could bring them about. It is to this model of direct democracy – model IV – that we now turn.

I suggest you read the chapter in short sections, coming back to this guide occasionally to attempt the exercises which will reinforce your understanding. As you read, you might try to keep two questions in mind:

1 What is the force of Marx's critique of liberal democracy?
2 Does Marxism force one to reconsider one's thinking about the social, political and economic 'preconditions' of democracy in the modern world?

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 96–108. Don't worry if you found Hegel pretty obscure: this is normal! But write down outline answers to these questions:

1 What were Marx's criticisms of the claims of liberal democracy?

2 What is the difference between Marx's two positions on the autonomy of the state and its relation to social classes, and why might it be important?

Points I would write down immediately on (1) above are:

1 Marx rejects the notion of 'the individual' at the basis of liberal political theory. He views man as a social being, and social classes as the key political actors.
2 He focuses on the economic 'base' as decisively determining the political and social 'superstructure', thus rejecting the liberal separation of the narrow political sphere from the wider operation of the market and economic forces in civil society.
3 He denies that the state can ever be a neutral force, impartially arbitrating social conflicts; on the contrary, he thinks it plays a central role in the maintenance of class-divided societies, and must, over the long term, protect the interests of the economically dominant class.
4 Formal equality in legal and political rights means little in the face of inequalities of wealth and power.
5 Freedom, for Marx, entails 'the complete democratization of society as well as the state; it can only be established with the destruction of social classes and ultimately the abolition of class power in all its forms' (p. 109).

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 108–16, then make some notes on this:

1 What, according to Marx, were the conditions which could bring about 'the end of politics'?

2 In what way might capitalism actually advance this process?

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 116–22, then make notes on these questions:

1 What are the main differences between the three competing interpretations of Marxism?

2 What, according to Held, are the principal problems with Marx's vision of 'the end of politics' mapped out in model IV?

Three final points on Marx. In my opinion it is not a decisive refutation of Marx's ideas to point out that many of his historical predictions have not been borne out by the subsequent development of capitalism. Marx's greatness rested more in the questions he asked about society, questions so fundamental that any future theory of politics, economics or ideology would have no choice but to address them if it was to be taken seriously. Secondly, Marx cannot be held responsible for all the things which have been said and done by people who called themselves Marxists. Towards the end of his life, on hearing a particular set of ideas described as Marxist, he replied 'Then I am not a Marxist.' Thirdly, one of the wonderful things about Marx's writing is its moral force. 'Thus far' he wrote, 'the philosophers have sought to understand the world. The point, however, is to change it.'

2.6 Review of Chapters 1–4

Well, congratulations - you have completed Part One! You have some summary notes to come back to for a quick recap, if you need one, and of course for revision. You are beginning to get a sense of some of the principal positions in the great historical debates about the meaning and possibilities of democracy. And you have seen them summarized in four classic models (six if you count the 'a's and 'b's!). You are getting used to David Held (and me)! For all these reasons the next section is going to seem easier.

Looking back at our study of states, ideas and democratic models, we have seen both change and continuity. As the historical background changes, so too does the scale of political institutions. Nations become larger, the state itself expands, and a higher proportion of adults become citizens. In succeeding models of democracy we see excluded groups gain entry to the political domain, and new issues come on to the political agenda. However, some theorists still draw lessons from the Athenian model: it seems ancient ideas never die but are simply reformulated for different conditions. There are still fierce arguments about the feasibility of direct versus indirect forms of democracy, and the desirability of greater citizen participation. It looks as if the democratic tide is flowing, but opposition to the further extension of democracy is still vocal, and even more importantly, powerful. Finally, we have begun what will become an ever more detailed and many-sided examination of liberal democracy and its critics. As the historical period and the models come closer and closer to where we are, I find myself more and more *involved.*

Let's not forget all those exercises and activities you have laboured over in working through the chapters. I tried to write them in such a way that you would practise the skills required for writing academic essays. In the early pages of the guide you read about techniques of critical reading, and were given some tools with which to evaluate arguments. In the large exercise on the Preface and Introduction you practised careful reading and note taking, including the search for the implications of significant phrases, and the collection of quotable quotations! In the course of the first four chapters you have done exercises which (1) carefully unpacked particular theories, (2) compared the main points of two different theories, noting what they had in common and where they differed, (3) drew out the less obvious underlying assumptions of some ideas, and (4) directly compared models. Quite often, when I set what must have looked like a hard question in an activity, you will have noted that I offered an answer myself! I hope you learned something from how I did that.

2.7 Critical reflection

Now for a critical reflection. I don't know about you, but every time I was introduced to a new model of democracy, I found that I had some feelings of surprise. I noted the

details of the model with interest, but every time I ended up saying to myself: 'Not sure this one really looks like democracy to me either!' What I conclude from this is that I have been carrying round in my head a set of assumptions about democracy which I use more or less unconsciously to evaluate anything which goes by that name. So my question to you is: 'If you have had some of the same feelings, then what do you think are the criteria we are assuming?' Let's have a small brainstorm about that. (Brainstorm in a teacup?) Just take a minute to jot down your first responses to the question: 'What am I assuming that real democracy is *about*?' My first responses follow.

I guess my assumptions are that democracy has something to do with:

1. Equality (of rights, treatment, respect).
2. Freedom (from oppression, suppression, the arbitrary will of others).
3. Power (having some, delegating it, making it accountable).
4. Universality of citizenship for adults (acknowledging their potential).
5. Participation in public life (shaping your world, acknowledging communal responsibilities).
6. A commitment to open discussion on matters of common concern.
7. Taking decisions by means of votes and abiding by a majority result.
8. Respecting the capacities and rights of the ordinary individual.

What did your list look like? Did you have any more items? What I notice about my list is that it includes absolute values (equality, freedom, respect), some principles designed to embody them (universal citizenship), and some procedural methods (open discussion, majority voting).

Let me say a few more things about this list. Obviously, listing a set of assumptions is not the same thing as giving a considered answer to the question 'What is democracy about?' But I think making the list is useful.

First, it is useful to set out consciously all the dimensions against which we seem to be measuring any particular model of democracy. It is interesting to work out, in relation

to a model which we feel is somehow inadequate, on which of these dimensions it seems to fall short.

Secondly, in assessing a model of democracy, or comparing one model with another, it is valuable to be aware of the assumptions and value judgements *you* are bringing to your analysis. Then you are more likely to be able to set them aside and evaluate the model on its own terms.

Thirdly, it makes you ask the questions: ‘Could any real-world system exhibit all these features to the maximum possible extent?’ ‘Do some necessarily have to be compromised or traded off against others?’ (To say nothing of the balance between democracy itself and other political goods such as security or economic well-being.) And if a certain balance, or tension, between elements is inevitable, then what makes us say that some compromises are acceptable and others not? Beginning to think about these things, beginning to sort them out for yourself (and I do mean beginning!) is itself the beginning of a really sophisticated understanding of democracy and its problems.