

3 *Models of Democracy Part Two: ‘Variants from the Twentieth Century’*

3.1 What you should be able to do by the end of Part Two

- 1 Recognize what is distinctive about each new model, and compare it critically with earlier models.
- 2 Summarize and begin to assess more critically the arguments of the theorists to whom you have been introduced.
- 3 Give some account of historical developments and variations *within* the major schools of thought – liberalism, Marxism, pluralism.
- 4 Place and discuss the models in relation to these major schools.
- 5 Begin to reflect on the significance of some contemporary political developments for democratic theory.

3.2 Chapter 5, ‘Competitive Elitism and the Technocratic Vision’

I found this opening to Part Two of *Models of Democracy* one of the most interesting chapters in the book. It seems to me that here the story of democracy takes an important change of gear. Although versions of each model we have studied were exhibited in real historical societies, some of the images at the centre of these models – the very exclusive debates in ancient Athens, the assembly politics of Rousseau, Locke’s person in the state of nature contemplating the terms of a social contract – seem more symbolic than real, and certainly very far from any sort of reality we can relate to. It is true that in Marx’s analysis of nineteenth-century capitalism one finds a profound and detailed analysis of the complexity of capitalist society, but he too sets before us an ideal vision of direct democracy under ultimate communism.

Suddenly with Weber and Schumpeter we are dealing with writers who lived more or less in our time (Weber died in 1920, Schumpeter in 1945), and who present us with a model which purports to be, not any kind of idealized democracy, but simply a description of the working of our political system. They take for granted the extension of voting rights towards universal suffrage, the growth of huge social institutions, the existence of enormous bureaucracies, large political parties, representative legislatures, and all the familiar pattern of elections and voting behaviour. And this picture is not static: they analyse trends in culture such as the decline of religion, the belief in

science and technology, the growing influence of the mass media. They ask calmly what our system of government amounts to in practice, what the meaning of democracy really is for us. What is its actual function? How does it deliver what politics and citizens need?

A Note on Theory

This was an important moment in the history of political science, as it came to be called. The claim to be engaged in the collection and scientific analysis of observed data appeared to move normative discussion from centre-stage. This, as Held explains, was a ‘fundamental transformation of democratic theory’.

This change of emphasis is also one of mood: the optimism of the nineteenth century, the confidence in reason and progress, gives way before a grimmer analysis of the costs of modern civilization, the banal realities of universal suffrage, and in the case of Schumpeter, the experience of fascism, Soviet communism and world war. The picture that they paint is by no means wholly negative. But unlike those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers who contemplated existing problems but viewed the future with confidence, Weber and Schumpeter think that we ought not to hope for too much.

As you read this chapter, try to keep in mind these questions:

- 1 Is this an accurate picture of the workings of liberal democracy? What does it leave out?
- 2 Are you persuaded by the arguments that no other form of democracy is viable in advanced industrial societies?

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 126–41 on Weber. Then take some time to make notes on the following:

- 1 **What were the key points of difference between Weber and Marx on the role of the state and the possibility of direct democracy?**
- 2 **What did Weber understand by democracy, and what value did he think it had in modern rational political systems?**

I wrote down the following points on question 2. It seems to me that for Weber, as for certain protective republicans and liberals, democracy is a *means* rather than an end in itself. For him it is an integral part of parliamentary government and the party system, and most importantly a means of selecting elites and giving them legitimacy. This is vital, he argues, because political leadership and an effective legislature, alongside a free market, are required to counterbalance the otherwise overweening power of the bureaucracy. The free market is the ultimate source of innovation, change and social mobility, and these counterbalancing forces have a crucial part to play in preserving liberty, competing values and freedom of choice. In asking the question: ‘How can such values be preserved against an overmighty bureaucracy?’ Weber is of course endorsing liberal concerns. But there is little of Mill’s sense that participation in public life is crucial to the development of the individual and hence the society as a whole: Held makes it clear that both Weber and Schumpeter tend to the view that ordinary people are and will remain predominantly passive, ill-informed, uninterested and even irrational when it comes to politics. They are credited with just enough sense to choose between rival leaders; they enjoy enough freedom to discuss political views freely, and, in principle, to run for office themselves. Mill was reluctant to concede equal voting rights to the masses before they achieved a certain degree of ‘cultivation’; in Weber they have the vote already but fortunately, for a number of reasons, play little part in forming public policy.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 141–57 on Schumpeter, then jot down some notes on the following:

- 1 How did Schumpeter’s definition of democracy as ‘competitive elitism’ differ from what he called ‘the classical doctrine of democracy’?**
- 2 Are you convinced by Schumpeter’s view of the political capacities of ordinary people, and the manufacturing of public opinion? If so, why?**

According to Schumpeter, the role of the citizen was simply to choose between competing leadership elites and by taking part in the election process to legitimize the resulting government. He was highly critical of more participatory models of democracy, and had no higher aims or hopes for the democratic method. He had real problems with such notions as the common good or the popular will, arguing that people have different conceptions of the good life and innumerable, different selfish

interests and desires. His 'empirical' and 'realistic' study of ordinary people led him to the view that, when it came to politics, they were 'weak, prone to strong emotional impulses' and exhibited 'a minimum sense of involvement, a low level of energy and thought, and great sensitiveness to non-logical influences' (p. 144). Both their desires and their opinions could in any case be strongly influenced by 'the hidden persuaders' in advertising and the mass media.

Held's assessment of Schumpeter argues that Schumpeter was contrasting an inaccurate account of what he called 'the classical theory of democracy' with a particular set of historical circumstances which appeared to be working tolerably well by his, Schumpeter's, standards. Held argues that:

- 1 Schumpeter's account of classical democracy was a fictional composite.
- 2 Schumpeter's 'empirical' account is just wrong about some things and inadequate in its explanation of others: for example, degrees of 'consent'.
- 3 There is a contradiction between saying ordinary people are not qualified to judge policy, but *are* qualified to choose policy makers.
- 4 The fact that twentieth-century liberal democracy has a particular form does not mean that is the only form it could take, let alone the best form.
- 5 Schumpeter foreclosed, without adequate discussion, the possibility of a range of other possible forms or developments of liberal democracy, for example 'the way in which aspects of the competitive model might be combined with more participatory schemes' (p. 152).
- 6 The theoretical freedom of citizens to participate and compete in the political process may be undermined by real inequalities of wealth and access, leading to apathy and a vicious circle of non-participation unanalysed by Schumpeter's simplistic model.

You must make your own estimate of the strengths of these two positions. I acknowledge Schumpeter's 'realism' in many respects, and I also see the logic of Held's criticisms. But I wonder if I sense here a clash of values too. Schumpeter is content that elites compete for the right to take the major political decisions, and he is content for voters to take 'a back seat' between elections. In comparison with the spectacle of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin, no doubt he thought he

had described a preferable and eminently defensible political system. But Held argues that democracy can and indeed *should* mean more than this, and much writing is now being focused on a range of practical ways in which more active, direct participation in policy discussion can occur for citizens between elections. (To say nothing of action through pressure groups or even direct involvement in government through corporatist measures, see chapter 6.) And after Marx, surely no political analysis which claims to be realistic can pass over with so little comment the discrepancy between formal freedoms and the real power to act and influence events which is determined by economic power?

3.3 Chapter 6, 'Pluralism, Corporate Capitalism and the State'

This chapter takes the story on in an intriguing way. We start in the company of two writers, Truman and Dahl, who called themselves 'empirical democratic theorists' and, like Schumpeter, believed themselves to be investigating 'the real workings of democracy'. However, they focused on a major aspect of life in modern democracies which was relatively neglected in the writings of Weber and Schumpeter: the fact that citizens not only discuss politics and vote for parties at elections, but also form themselves into thousands of large and small interest groups, and set about competing for advantage. You will remember that Madison (chapter 2) was preoccupied with this phenomenon, but intriguingly Truman and Dahl take a very different view of what Madison called the problem of 'factions'.

They set out to describe how power is distributed in modern society, and they are particularly interested in (a) whether government policy is consistently manipulated in their own interest by a small minority, and (b) whether minority interests are at risk (as Mill feared) from the intolerance of the democratic majority (pp. 158–65). Their reassuring conclusions, which made up the theory of classic pluralism, are critically assessed (pp. 165–9) not only in terms of their logic and assumptions, but also in the light of subsequent empirical research which tested their findings. Some pluralists, such as Dahl, modified and refined their positions (neo-pluralism), but a more radical challenge to the whole basis of pluralism was mounted by neo-Marxist critics (pp. 172–9). They focused on the crucial question, first raised by Marx, of the role of the state: its actual behaviour under corporate capitalism, and how far it could act

independently of the dominant economic and business interests. Finally (pp. 179–83) Held looks at the theory of corporatism, another radical challenge to the classic pluralist account of liberal democracy. This theory assesses the way in which very powerful groups, such as business and organized labour, can be ‘incorporated’ by the state into policy making (‘beer and sandwiches at number 10’) in such a way as to side-step completely the normal democratic channels of representation, i.e. parties, parliamentary debate and the activities of smaller pressure groups.

There are a number of distinct groups of theorists here, and you need clear accounts of them in your head for future reference. For this chapter in particular, I suggest working through the text closely in the following way.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 158–65, then see if you can answer these questions:

- 1 According to Truman and Dahl, how did polyarchy protect democracy against the government of a self-interested minority or the tyranny of the majority?**
- 2 What did they mean by ‘the social prerequisites’ of polyarchy?**
- 3 What was the role of the state in producing policy out of the ‘endless process of bargaining’ between interest groups?**

ACTIVITY

Now read pp. 165–9, and make brief notes on:

- 1 The most powerful criticisms of classic pluralism.**
- 2 The main neo-pluralist modifications of the classic pluralist account of interest group politics and the distribution of power (see model VI).**

ACTIVITY

Now read pp. 172–9 and make brief notes on:

- 1 The neo-Marxist critique of pluralism: Miliband, Poulantzas and Offe.**

Here's my attempt at that last question.

The neo-Marxist critique holds that it is anything but 'realistic' of pluralist writers to deny or omit the issue of class power and its relation to the state, and focus exclusively on interest group behaviour, the operation of institutions and electoral competition. This critique aims a missile at the idea of the state as a neutral body refereeing the competition between an ever changing series of interest coalitions to make policy reflecting now one set of interests, now another.

Miliband: In capitalist societies there is a dominant class, heavily represented in command positions within the state and other powerful social institutions, with a shared social background, ideology and career interests. This makes them a cohesive and overwhelmingly powerful force in shaping government policy and public opinion, in such a way as to forestall any meaningful challenge to the structure of power inherent in capitalism.

Poulantzas (and you thought Hegel was difficult!): Basically, Poulantzas emphasizes that the state is central to capitalism in acting to 'organize' the different 'fractions' of the capitalist class (for example industrial capital as against finance capital); to 'disorganize' the working class to prevent effective unified opposition; and to 'regroup' other classes as necessary. To undertake these activities it requires 'relative autonomy' from particular fractions of the dominant class, but fundamentally it is 'a class state' working in the interests of capitalism as a whole. *But* there are difficulties and contradictions: both the unity and autonomy of the state are variable – it is itself a site of struggle – and while it acts at one level to fragment the body politic, at another it attempts to construct national unity.

Offe: For Offe the state is ceaselessly manoeuvring in an attempt to resolve or keep balanced its utterly contradictory position. (1) It is not involved in capitalist accumulation processes itself, but must protect accumulation and the free market because it depends on capitalism for revenue (via taxation). (2) At the same time governments need to convince the electorate that the state *is* neutral *vis-à-vis* class interests, and they require resources to implement popular policies, which forces them

to tackle economic problems by intervention. As Held says: ‘the state then must intervene, but disguise its preoccupation with the health of capital’ (p. 177).

The second important point about Offe’s analysis is that in its manoeuvring the state tends to rely on support from powerful social groups; accordingly its approach to political and social problems is often to suppress or ‘displace’ them at the expense of marginal or vulnerable social groups. Nevertheless the state has enacted many benefits for non-dominant but powerful groups, such as organized labour, and in this picture of the state being ‘pushed and pulled by a variety of forces’ we see a much less narrow account than that offered by some Marxist and neo-Marxist writers.

Held underlines that, unlike Miliband and Poulantzas, Offe’s views converge in many respects with the neo-pluralism of Lindblom and Dahl. All three would agree that:

- 1 There are significant limits placed on the political agenda by private control of the means of production.
- 2 The state in liberal democracies must be biased towards the ‘corporate agenda’ because of financial dependency.
- 3 The state nevertheless has some degree of autonomy in Marx’s sense, though it manoeuvres within constraints.

ACTIVITY

Now read pp. 179–83 on the theory of corporatism. Then ask yourself:

- 1 Can I define corporatism in a sentence?**
- 2 Would I agree that corporatism represents a significant new form of representation?**

Last word! Finally, on pages 183–4 Held has a useful set of concluding thoughts on where these debates have taken democratic theory. By the end of this chapter I had only one question left: ‘Is there *anything* of value left in the classical theory of pluralism as first stated?’

3.4 Chapter 7, ‘From Postwar Stability to Political Crisis: The Polarization of Political Ideals’

This is a cracking chapter, for two reasons: one, it talks about our own era, and it is of course fascinating to see how theorists describe and explain events that you have lived through and thought about yourself! And two, I think the theories and debates are very clearly set out. We again spend some time looking at the recent history of the modern liberal democratic state, and theories about how it was functioning, before focusing more narrowly on two further models of democracy. The chapter divides the postwar era into two distinct periods (roughly before and after 1965), in which there were differing levels of economic performance, differing political consequences, and, from academic observers, differing sets of explanatory theories.

In the first part of the chapter, what is new and striking is the focus on the general political *culture* of postwar Britain and the United States: the feelings which citizens had about government and the political system more generally. Now political attitudes are of the utmost importance: long before Weber produced his celebrated analysis of legitimacy (remember chapter 5, pp. 130–1), the Scottish philosopher David Hume pointed out that the survival of governments depended principally on ‘opinion’. But attitudes are more intangible things than, say, average take-home pay. It is hard to measure accurately what attitudes millions of people actually have about politics, difficult to know how quickly those attitudes may change, and extremely hard to say what effect they will have on political actions.

The second part of the chapter introduces two further models of democracy, based on the ideas of the New Right and the New Left.

It finally arrives at what I, for one, have been waiting for since the beginning: the contemporary version of the argument – which of course has been going on since the Greeks – between those who look at current politics, point out a range of problems, and conclude that we have too much democracy; and those who look at the same political events, state the problems differently, and conclude that we have too little democracy. There is no escaping the relevance of this for what democracy means to *us*: the arguments of the New Right have been central to the politics of Thatcher and Reagan;

the arguments of the New Left are crucial to any account of what a more egalitarian and participatory model of democracy might mean under the conditions of a large modern nation-state.

The chapter takes forward a number of themes and debates from earlier chapters:

- The scrutiny of how liberal democracy actually seems to work.
- A central theoretical concern with the nature of the state and how it operates.
- The continuing theoretical debate between those who restate the contemporary struggle of liberalism, and those who attack its contemporary weaknesses.
- The question of how far a more egalitarian and participatory model of democracy is compatible with liberal democracy under capitalism: reform or revolution?

On pp. 185–90 Held examines two theories which sought to explain the apparently high degree of political consensus associated with the postwar boom: the theory of ‘the end of ideology’ and the theory of ‘one-dimensional man’. On pages 190–6 he turns to two theories associated with the later economic downturn and disillusionment with the welfare state: theories of ‘the erosion of consensus’ and ‘the crisis of democracy’. On pages 196–201 these are critically assessed. On pages 201–9 Held looks at the political ideas of the New Right, in particular those of Hayek and Nozick (summarized in model VII: Legal Democracy). Finally, on pages 209–16 he analyses the ideas of the New Left, in particular the work of Macpherson and Pateman (model VIII: Participatory Democracy).

As usual, I suggest that you read the chapter in the following sections, coming back to the study guide to attempt the activities.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 185–90, then jot down answers to these questions:

- 1 What do the theories of ‘the end of ideology’ and ‘one-dimensional man’ have in common?**
- 2 What are the main problems with these common elements?**

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 190–6, then make notes on these questions:

- 1 What are the common threads in the ‘overloaded government’ and ‘legitimation crisis’ theories?
- 2 What are the principal objections to these common elements?

Now you probably expect me to attempt at least some of these questions with you, but this time I’m not going to do it! The reason for this is that the chapter seems to me both clear and straightforward, although there is quite a lot of detail. Both the theories themselves, and the problems with them raised by Held, are quite comprehensible, especially if you follow the very helpful diagrams 7.2 and 7.3. Instead I’m going to concentrate on something else, because it seems to me that on pages 196–201 you have a wonderful example of how to go about assessing a theory critically.

3.5 How to assess a theory critically

Let’s analyse just how Held sets about this.

First, he sets out the essence of the positions he is considering (in this case, ‘the common thread’ between the ‘overload’ and ‘legitimation crisis’ theorists) in a series of statements. Notice that where necessary he defines the key terms, like power. Then (second paragraph on p. 197) he underlines the crucial claim – ‘state power and political stability alter with changes to the pattern of values and norms’. He then states the three fundamental problems or objections he is going to make in a paragraph, as a prelude to going into each in more detail.

The first objection is factual or empirical: he points out that ‘there is no clear evidence to support the claim of a progressively worsening crisis of the state’s authority or legitimacy in the period in question’. Held does not say that the claim is wrong, or that there could be no such evidence, simply that no evidence has in fact been produced.

The second objection is conceptual. A doubtful empirical claim – that state power is eroding – appears to be based on a misunderstanding about the nature of the state. He asserts, and will go on to demonstrate, that the theorists under discussion not only

‘underestimate the state’s own capabilities and resources’ but actually misunderstand what kind of an entity the state is.

The third objection is one of logic, although it is based in part on the misunderstanding identified in the second objection. Since the state is not the same thing as the government, to say that governments may be in trouble if the electorate fail to confer legitimacy is not at all the same thing as saying the state is necessarily ‘vulnerable to collapse or disintegration’.

On objection one, Held then introduces a more sophisticated notion of legitimacy by talking about degrees of consent, and differences according to social class, and refers to a range of academic studies which show that there never was anything like a widespread value consensus on the legitimacy of the liberal democratic state. Furthermore, there is no evidence that such approval as there was has obviously declined. And finally, such disapproval as there was did not take the form of criticizing the existing political and economic *system*, ‘with clear demands for alternative kinds of institutions’.

On objection two, Held explains how the state is an entity capable of working actively to protect itself in the face of difficulties and contradictions. While the state may not have the power to *solve* social and economic problems in the interests of all, it can implement displacement strategies which ensure that their effects fall upon social groups without the political power to threaten the state itself. Hence political problems need not entail a genuine crisis with transformative potential.

It is notable how much mileage Held gets, one might almost say how much damage he inflicts, with his very careful definition and discrimination of terms. Although the terms are related, legitimacy is not the same thing as power, and the government is not the same thing as the state. Meanwhile, legitimacy is not simple: in so far as it is measurable, it appears to vary according to the issue, according to the state of the economy, according to the social class of the citizens, and over time.

Notice that Held goes beyond mere criticism of the theories. To refute a theory, or simply cast doubt on its adequacy, it would be enough to highlight unsubstantiated

empirical claims, point to counterevidence, identify errors of logic and show that key concepts were confused or misunderstood. But in doing this Held has actually put himself in a position to offer alternative explanations for the observed phenomena, demonstrating a stronger conceptual structure and a better fit to known facts. (In the vital middle paragraph on page 199 you get the essence of Held's theory on how political consent actually works.) Accordingly he is able, on page 200, to deliver a summary verdict on the theories of overload or legitimation crisis, concluding that while elements of them are insightful, they are broadly unconvincing, and he is able to reformulate the questions addressed by the theories in a sharper way. And, because of the way he has argued his points, his verdict is more than an opinion, or a preference. It is a view or a position which deserves to be taken seriously. This is true even if another theorist were to come along capable of proving with similar rigour that Held's facts, assumptions, logic or understanding of concepts were mistaken or capable of improvement, and that there is a more compelling way of addressing these questions and accounting for these developments.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 201–9 and make some notes on these questions:

- 1 What are Hayek and Nozick arguing *against*? What is the enemy?**
- 2 What important dimensions of modern politics do their analyses *omit*?**

The enemy is the interventionist state and the ideas which justify it. Like Schumpeter and others writing in the 1930s and 1940s, Hayek writes against the backdrop of German fascism, Soviet communism and the early growth of the welfare state in the Western democracies. Common to all of these was an enormous and continuing increase in the size, power and 'reach' of the state, leading in the case of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to totalitarianism in which the most fundamental rights of citizens under liberal democracy were denied. Hayek and other observers of this process were driven to offer a restatement of the transcendent values of freedom and individual rights, even against the other goods such as progress, welfare and egalitarian reform promised by the advocates of greater state intervention.

Arguments like these were of course central in the opening propaganda salvos of the Cold War. (In 1945 there were many who predicted that this fate was possible for

Britain if present trends continued: in a 1945 election campaign speech Winston Churchill asked those members of the electorate contemplating a vote for the Labour Party whether they really wanted ‘the harsh clumsy hand of totalitarianism clapped over the nostrils of the free-breathing Englishman’. You may reflect that the election result gave Winston the response this kind of talk deserved.) In the immediate postwar period there was, nevertheless, rapid growth of the welfare state in almost all Western democracies, accompanied by higher living standards, and in the 1950s and 1960s less was heard of these arguments. However, with the recession of the 1970s and the kinds of disillusion with the operation of the welfare state set out above, there was a revival of anti-state theories drawing on the heritage of nineteenth-century liberalism and indeed the work of writers like Hayek.

A Note on Theory

This process in which elements of older theories are revived, reinterpreted and recombined in new historical circumstances, and for new political purposes, is a crucial one in the formation of beliefs and ideologies.

Both Hayek and Nozick attempt to argue from first principles to a philosophical and constitutional conclusion on where to draw the line between proper and improper state intervention in society and the economy. They are emphatically not convinced that a democratic majority is always right, and, if pressed, would rank democracy and material equality below liberty in an absolute hierarchy of values. They argue that large areas of social life should not be considered as within the scope of political action at all: their stance is powerfully ‘protective’. In his assessment Held asks: ‘What does this analysis leave out?’ I’ll leave you to answer that one.

ACTIVITY

Read pp. 209–16.

- 1 What are the New Left *criticisms* of Marxism?**
- 2 What do the ideas of the New Left *owe* to liberalism?**

The significance of model VIII is that it is the first systematic attempt we have read since Marx to show what a more participatory form of democracy might look like in advanced industrial society. It challenges the ideology of liberal democracy which

continues to assert the reality of the notion of free and equal individuals in the face of ‘the rigid structures hitherto imposed by private capital, class relations, and other systematic asymmetries of power’ (p. 214). In a sense the model is very ambitious. Believing that citizens are, or can become, much more interested, involved and competent than Schumpeter gave them credit for, it tries to sketch out how some of the central aims of Marx and Mill – self-development through participation, increased democratic control/accountability of the state and other social institutions, meaningful freedom and choice – could be implemented, without overturning all the central institutions of liberal democracy as we know it, or abandoning the market altogether. It does, of course, take the developmental thrust of liberalism very seriously: one of its major themes is that collective decision-making must be extended from political to economic institutions, such as the workplace. But you don’t have to be a Marxist to ask how such democratized political and social institutions would dovetail with the operation of a more or less market economy.

The contrast with the New Right is not straightforward. Both models are reactions against the present pattern of liberal democracy, the present mix of public and private, the present political realities for individuals. Both derive powerful elements from liberalism. Both want more power for individuals and more controls on the state. Both applaud experimentation in patterns of living and hence more freedom for individuals to influence the institutions that control their lives. While neither offers answers to hard questions about how we might get from where we are to where they want to go, both are true visions of citizenship attempting to retrieve central elements of democracy from what they regard as unacceptable compromise or corruption. As Held shows, both New Right and New Left continue to pose questions for each other which are exceptionally difficult to answer.

3.6 Chapter 8, ‘Democracy after Soviet Communism’

This short chapter is a gem. It deals with the fall of Eastern European communism in 1989, and theories about the meaning of those events for modern politics and democracy. But in the course of this discussion the chapter, which reads like a really good article, provides a bold, simple restatement, comparison and criticism of key theories that you have studied so far, notably Marxism and liberalism. It’s brief, lucid

summary of some key points is invaluable. As Held says, ‘The chapter presents in microcosm some of the key issues, problems and discussions about democracy, its past, present and possible futures’ (p. 217).

The chapter has four subsections. In the first (pp. 218–20), Held briefly sketches the fall of Eastern European communism, and some crucial trends which led up to it. Then (p. 220) he turns to perhaps the most famous of historical verdicts on the events of 1989, Francis Fukuyama’s declaration that with the triumph of liberalism over its main ideological rival, we had reached ‘the end of history’. Held unpacks and assesses that claim (pp. 222–4) before turning to an alternative account of the meaning of the revolutions of 1989 by Callinicos (pp. 225–7) which he assesses in turn (pp. 227–9). Held ends by contrasting individualist and collectivist accounts of the good life, indicating what he thinks are their distinctive ‘blind spots’ and setting up the discussion to come in Part 3.

Unusually, I recommend that you read the chapter straight through. It has a drive and momentum which are worth enjoying, as the ideas and counter-ideas unfold naturally one after the other. After the chapter, you should come back and check your grasp of the main points in these exercises.

ACTIVITY

Fukuyama

- 1 What does Fukuyama mean by the ‘the end of history’? What will end, and what will continue?**
- 2 How far do you think his theory is weakened by the omissions noted by Held?**

Callinicos

- 3 What does Callinicos mean by saying that liberalism has broken its promises?**
- 4 How does Callinicos attack the equation Marxism = Leninism = Stalinism?**

General

- 5 Why does Held write that ‘the appeal and nature of democracy itself remains inadequately considered by both Fukuyama and Callinicos?’ (p. 230)**

6 In what ways can the traditions of (a) liberalism, and (b) socialism be found wanting, according to Held, from the point of view of democracy?

Again, careful reading and listening will provide answers to the first four questions for you. Here is my answer to question 6 above. Would you agree with it?

A crucial problem is that the liberal separation of politics and government into a separate sphere from the economy means that ‘a vast domain of what is central to politics tends to be excluded from view’. What this means is that, as Marxist critics point out, ‘the key source of contemporary power – private ownership of the means of production – is unacceptably depoliticized by liberalism’ (p. 227). This refusal to acknowledge the link between economic and political power, and the realities of class, leads to a second crucial problem. Liberalism ‘generally *assumes* ... what has to be carefully examined; namely whether existing relationships among men and women, working, middle and upper classes, blacks and whites, and various ethnic groups allow *formally* recognized liberties to be actually realized’ (p. 225, my italics). It does not come to terms with ‘the massive number of people who are restricted systematically, for want of a complex mix of resources and life opportunities, from participating actively in political and civil affairs’.

However, the Marxist analysis of the political terms of economic and class power, and its ‘failure to treat politics as an autonomous sphere’ (p. 228) also leads Marxism to marginalize or exclude from politics certain types of issues. ‘Marxism has consistently underestimated the significance of the liberal preoccupation with how to secure freedom of criticism and action, i.e. choice and diversity, in the face of political power’ (p. 228). It can be argued that Stalinism was not simply an ‘aberration’ within Marxism, but had its roots partly in ‘the “deep structure” of Marxist categories’, notably its neglect or misunderstanding of ‘the liberal and liberal democratic preoccupation with the form and limits of state power’ (p. 228). This failure to address fundamental problems around the nature, operation and possibility of controlling the state is at the heart of a crisis of all forms of socialism, not merely Stalinism.

3.7 Critical reflection and review of Chapters 5--8

In the last four chapters the focus has been ever more strongly on an analysis of the operation of liberal democracy, and the attempt by theorists to give an account of particular historical phases, identifying what seem to them to be crucial features or developments, and making generalizations from them on the nature of modern politics. At the heart of this has been the attempt to describe and theorize the nature, operation and possibilities of the state itself. Weaving in and out of that has been an analysis of the nature and limits of democracy under modern capitalism, looking at how representative democracy works in practice, the significance of interest group politics, and the identification of new social movements and forms of representation. We have reviewed very different conceptions of citizenship, some emphasizing limited participation and passivity, others asserting new possibilities for participation designed to augment (or subvert) the traditional channels of political action. The whole concept of legitimacy and political attitudes more generally arrived centre-stage. Historical and technological developments, such as the fall of communism and the rise and pervasive influence of the mass media (not unrelated phenomena) required a rethinking of the framework within which democracy, and debates about it, would henceforth have to operate. And yet the classic debates, or modern forms of them, are still with us. Many theorists still talk of the Greeks and quote Plato, Mill and Marx.

Perhaps the most important note on theory I have made for myself is that almost every theorist highlights something true or important, and approaches it with a method, or with some useful new concepts, from which we can learn, even if we have many general or detailed criticisms to make of his or her work.

In terms of skills, the activities you have completed will certainly have sharpened your ability to analyse, critically evaluate and compare ideas. The notes on chapter 7 included an extended lesson in how to go about evaluating a theory. No student who has grappled, even briefly, with Hegel and Poulantzas will be unchanged by the experience. And finally, I hope you find yourself disagreeing with me, or better still, Held, from time to time. If so, you are beginning to develop critical independence of mind on these topics.

Remember the brainstorm we did after the first four chapters on our assumptions about democracy? Well here's another one. On the basis of the last four chapters, jot down what comes to mind on this question: 'What are the crucial issues in debates about democracy today?'

I've got:

- 1 *The centrality of the state* in any model of how liberal democracy works (indeed any theory of modern politics, and the possibilities of meaningful reform).
- 2 The relation between theoretical claims about citizenship and economic realities.
- 3 The relation between the economic sphere and politics more generally.
- 4 How opinion is formed and how it affects political behaviour.
- 5 Conflicting prescriptions for change, from egalitarian participatory models, to, in practice, inegalitarian minimalist models of legal democracy.

Do you have all these on your list? Do you have any others? I do feel that our practical and theoretical understanding of the central model of democracy in our lives, liberal democracy with (under?) capitalism, is becoming more sophisticated. Speaking for myself, I am now a much more critical reader of newspapers, and a much more argumentative viewer of *Newsnight* and *Question Time*!

3.8 Chapter 9, 'Deliberative Democracy and the Defence of the Public Realm'

There have been many kinds of doubt about democracy. You have encountered theorists who thought it was a bad idea in principle; theorists who sought to delimit it and constrain it in practice; theorists who sought to overthrow it as a fiction masking realities of class power and liberal ideology; and theorists who wished to return to some form of direct democracy as a kind of purgative of the ills of actually existing democracy. (My favourite doubter was a late nineteenth-century English conservative who knew that universal suffrage was coming, and wondered what it might mean. He memorably defined democracy as 'listening nervously at one end of a speaking-tube [telephone] which receives at its other end the intimations of a lower intelligence'.)

This is the final chapter before David Held gives his own answer to the question: ‘What should democracy mean today?’ And what makes it so engrossing is that you are introduced to perhaps the hottest of contemporary debates about democracy: an up-to-the-minute discussion about the ills and shortcomings of our own liberal democratic practice, and what we can do about it.

Many of the theorists of deliberative democracy seem profoundly disappointed by the fact that universal suffrage, almost one hundred per cent literacy, free education and a free press, plus a multiplicity of political parties, have not led to a flowering of democracy. They are critical of the behaviour of both citizens and politicians, critical of the political process, critical of the quality of decision-making, and perhaps above all critical of the quality of political discussion and debate. They analyse not only institutions, but also crucial aspects of the wider culture within which those institutions operate. Unlike some earlier critics of liberal democracy, they seek not to overthrow it, but to improve it. They do this by:

- identifying the problems in our current practice;
- challenging some of the core assumptions of democratic theory to date;
- focusing particularly on the *process* of opinion formation, and the form and ethos of our public political discussions;
- suggesting a series of reforms and experiments to bring about a revival or refreshment of citizenship and a higher quality of democratic practice.

Now in some ways this subject is familiar: in our newspapers we read all the time about political cynicism, widespread disillusion with the political process, and the apathy and lack of engagement of ordinary citizens. In Britain, both devolution and the initiatives on teaching citizenship in schools are in part attempts to address these problems. But be careful: the discussion of deliberative democracy is about all that, yes, but the analysis is enormously more subtle and refined. Key terms, such as reason, rationality, and impartiality are used in highly specific ways. You need to be clear about what each theorist is saying, and note how they *differ* from each other. The differences in their analyses – the assumptions they make, and where they put their

emphasis – can lead to important differences in the outcomes they seek. Although at first one might guess that a kind of disdain for the democracy we have now (and for the judgement of the mass of citizens) would be associated with elitism, in practice many writers on deliberative democracy have radical prescriptions which lead in an egalitarian direction. For them, the solution to the problems of democracy is – more and better democracy! Or, as Held puts it, ‘an imaginative rethinking of democracy offering a new kind of participation’ (ch. 9, p. 235).

One final point: this is a funny sort of model. We don’t have detailed agreement on what a future polity transformed by deliberative practices would look like, and hence deliberative democracy can be presented principally as an ongoing programme of discussion and research. Alongside the academic debate, however, a range of institutional experiments described later in the chapter is taking place in Western democracies as I write (2006). The discussion is not, then, simply theoretical. And it is emphatically not ‘academic’ in the popular sense!

The chapter falls into three distinct parts. In pages 231–8 Held gives a quick rehearsal of older models as they touch on these themes (pp. 231–2), introduces the key concepts of reason and participation (pp. 232–4), introduces the criticisms which Fishkin and Elster make of traditional liberal democracy (pp. 234–7) and sets out the aims of deliberative democracy (pp. 237–8).

ACTIVITY

When you have read pp. 231–8, check your understanding by answering these questions:

- 1 How do theorists of deliberation problematize the traditional liberal democratic notions of an individual's preferences and the public interest?**
- 2 In what ways have assumptions and practices of the marketplace been imported into the forum, and with what results?**
- 3 What are the limitations of direct democracy for deliberative democrats?**

ACTIVITY

Now read pp. 238–46, in which Held fleshes out the core deliberative concept of impartialism (pp. 238–41) and assesses some of the criticisms which have been made of it (pp. 241–6). Then see if you can answer these questions:

- 1 What is meant by ‘reasoning from the point of view of others’, and ‘the principle of reciprocity’?
- 2 Does the fact of our individual particularity, and the irreconcilability of some moral judgements, make the ideal reasoning of impartialism impossible?
- 3 How might the ‘canonical’ mode of reasoning of a dominant group work to marginalize minorities, neglect other ways of being heard, or lead to ‘agreements which reflect the distortions of power’?
- 4 What is meant by promoting ‘a politics of inclusion’ that nurtures ‘the ideal of a heterogeneous public’?

On page 246, Held has an extremely useful account summarizing what the impartialists and their critics nevertheless have in common. From that point on, he takes his foot off the theoretical gas a bit, and in pages 247–55 gives a relatively more practical account of the institutions of deliberative democracy: deliberative polls, deliberative days, citizens’ juries, the extended use of referenda, new voter feedback mechanisms, discursive public fora, utilizing the internet and other electronic media, civic education, and the public funding of deliberative bodies.

There are more examples than arguments in this section, but at the end you may wish to reflect on how far such developments ‘provide avenues for deepening political participation within existing patterns of representative politics’ (p. 250); and how far deliberation can be regarded as ‘a transformative mode of reasoning’ (p. 252) leading to a genuinely new model of democracy? Held leaves us with three final questions: the core questions around which all deliberative democrats make their cases:

- Why deliberate?
- Who deliberates, and where should deliberation take place?
- When can it be concluded that deliberation has been successful?

If you feel quite confident that you have read and understood enough to answer examination questions like these, then you've 'got' deliberative democracy, as the phrase goes. I will add only a few remarks of my own here. First, I noted the similarities between this model and model VIII: the New Left prescription for a greater level of discussion, participation and control by ordinary citizens. Earlier in this study guide I wrote that model VIII was a vision of citizenship attempting to retrieve central elements of democracy from what it regarded as unacceptable levels of compromise and corruption. I added that it did not, however, appear to offer answers to hard questions about how we might get from where we are now to where we want to go. Well, in a sense, the range of institutional reform and experiment suggested by deliberative democrats does attempt to answer precisely such questions. Moreover, the analysis of liberal democracy penetrates beyond the institutions to the culture in which they are embedded. Writers such as Tully seem to me to be doing something very important when they point to the way in which the power of dominant elites is expressed and maintained partly by controlling the language, the modes, of acceptable political argument. In challenging this political discourse, and hence aiming to transform the way in which citizens develop opinions, express preferences, negotiate their differences, and make political demands, it seems to me that deliberative democrats are doing something more profound than institutional tinkering.