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# Democracy unbound? Non-linear politics and the politicization of everyday life

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## **Abstract**

In liberal modernity, the democratic collective will of society was understood to emerge through the public and deliberative freedoms of associational life. Today, however, democratic discourse is much more focused on the formation of plural and diverse publics in the private and social sphere. In these 'non-linear' approaches, democracy is no longer seen to operate to constitute a collective will standing above society but as a mechanism to distribute power more evenly through the social empowerment of individuals and communities as the ultimate decision-makers. Government is brought back 'to the people' and democracy is seen to circulate through the personal decisions made in everyday life. This article seeks to analyse the development of non-linear approaches to the political sphere, which seek to overcome the rationalist assumptions of the public/private divide, paying particular attention to the work of two key liberal theorists, John Dewey and Friedrich von Hayek.

## **Keywords**

democracy, Dewey, Hayek, neoliberalism, pragmatism

Democracy has historically been bound to the problematic of constituting a collective public will above the plurality of competing private interests within the social sphere. In liberal modernity, this collective democratic will was constituted through the

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establishment of a public sphere of formal equality before the law and at the ballot box and through civic freedoms – of the press, of speech, of association, and the like. This struggle, between the civic aspiration for the development of the collective good and the threat to the collectivity posed by the corruption of private interests and power, seems to have become much less central to democratic theory. Today, democracy works on a different problematic, not that of manufacturing a single collective will – separate to and distinct from the private wills of groups and individuals – but the problematic of legitimizing rule through bringing democracy down to the societal level of plural and individuated ‘everyday life’. The demand for democracy today is that of unbounding or freeing democracy from its liberal limits.

Non-linear approaches<sup>1</sup> suggest that the liberal modernist framing of the state as a monolithic or homogenous actor ruling over and directing a pluralized public of citizens no longer operates, at either the level of ontological description or of normative legitimization, in today’s polity. The liberal hierarchical binary of the state as rule or command, by virtue of its collectively constituted authority, *vis-à-vis* the public as ruled, by virtue of its constitutive plurality, cannot seemingly be maintained in a world where the representational authority of constituted power no longer seems able to direct, control or contain the constitutive power of the public. As debates about the rise of neoliberal discourse (Harvey, 2005; Crouch, 2011) or the end of ‘Left and Right’ (Giddens, 1994; Beck, 1997), or globalization and complexity (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992; Cerny, 2010) appear to testify, there seems to be a disconnection between the liberal understanding of the formal constitutive power of the public through the process of representation and the informal or social constitutive power of the public, which seems in excess of the limits and constraints of the formal representative sphere (Hardt and Negri, 2006; Virno, 2004).

It is increasingly held that, in a non-linear world, the public must be understood as self-constituting through everyday decision-making and interaction. The democratic state thereby no longer stands above or separate to society but works to facilitate a more responsible or reflexive operation of plural and differentiated private judgements (see, for example, Giddens, 1994; Beck, 1997; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Lash, 2002; Latour, 2004; Dallmayr, 2010; Connolly, 2011). This article seeks to draw out how both the processes of democracy and the space(s) in which it is held to operate have been transformed and pluralized. In particular, it focuses on the development of the analytical framings of non-linearity as a response to the perceived problems of democratic representation in a world of increasing complexity and the breakdown of traditional, linear, state–society relations. In this discussion, the limits of democratic will formation no longer constrain the growth of democracy but rather facilitate it, extending democracy into the ‘everyday’ and the ‘politics’ of ‘life’ itself (see further, Michel Foucault’s juxtaposition of sovereign power *vis-à-vis* biopower, Foucault, 1981: 135–45; see also Foucault, 2003: 239–63; 2008).

The analytical framing of non-linear approaches, bringing democracy down to the level of everyday life, will be heuristically drawn out through engaging with their first major treatments in liberal theorizing, in the work of Walter Lippmann, John Dewey and Friedrich von Hayek.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, the radical claims made on behalf of current non-linear critiques of rationalist assumptions and of the public/private divide will be explicitly challenged. In these frameworks, the personal becomes political, but not in the

sense of the early feminist movement understanding that ‘personal problems are political problems’ (Hanisch, 1969). The ‘personal is political’ was a radical call to see how politics percolated down to shape the everyday experiences (the ‘personal problems’) of individuals. In representing personal problems as not individual but as collective political problems, these feminists aspired to politicize women towards greater public political engagement. However, in ‘non-linear’ complex and emergent understandings, which seek to extend the spaces and processes of democracy, the opposite relationship is in play: individuals and communities are to be empowered to reflexively work on their personal choices and practices in order to effect political change. ‘Political problems’ are thereby ‘depoliticized’ and represented as ‘personal problems’ which can be dealt with by empowered individuals and communities.

The democratization of ‘everyday life’ understands that political subjects are embedded in differentiated, plural and overlapping social and cognitive communities. It is important that in this framing, the social sphere is understood as distinct both from the contractual relations of the market and from the formal public sphere. In representing political problems as ‘personal’ or social products, leading Foucauldian sociologists, Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, have noted that individuals are governed ‘neither as isolated atoms of classical political economy’ – i.e. as interest-bearing subjects – ‘nor as citizens of society’ – as rights-bearing subjects – ‘but as members of heterogeneous communities of allegiance, as community emerges as a new way of conceptualizing and administering moral relations among persons’ (Miller and Rose, 2008: 25). In this framing, democracy can be promulgated without the assumptions of universality, rationality and autonomy presumed in the discourses of modern liberalism. Miller and Rose articulate the current problematic, with regard to the ‘new specification of the subject of government’ (2008: 213), thus:

Within this new regime of the actively responsible self, individuals are to fulfil their national obligations not through their relations of dependency and obligation to one another, but through seeking to fulfil themselves within a variety of micro-moral domains or ‘communities’ – families, workplaces, schools, leisure associations, neighbourhoods. Hence the problem is to find the means by which individuals may be made responsible through their individual choices for themselves and those to whom they owe allegiance, through the shaping of a lifestyle according to grammars of living that are widely disseminated, yet do not depend upon political calculations and strategies for their rationales or for their techniques. (2008: 214)

Governing authority no longer becomes exercised in the old way, as intervention and regulation from above society, in the form of liberal government on behalf of, or over, the social whole. Rather, new forms of governance appear as ways of democratizing society itself through ‘empowering’ or ‘capability-building’ the citizen, enabling political subjects to take societal responsibility upon themselves and their communities. Miller and Rose are entirely correct in noting that this ‘ethical *a priori* of active citizens in an active society is perhaps the most fundamental, and most generalizable, characteristic of these new rationalities of government’ (2008: 215). Mitchell Dean concurs that the task of government today lies precisely in the management and regulation of, or inculcation of, the agency of the governed. The solution to problems of society, whether

in the form of welfare, crime or conflict becomes then not that of liberal forms of state intervention but of the development of societal agency:

Victims of crime, smokers, abused children, gay men, intravenous drug users, the unemployed, indigenous people and so on are all subject to these technologies of agency, the object being to transform their status, to make them active citizens capable, as individuals and communities, of managing their own risk. (Dean, 2010: 196–7)

The modern state does not withdraw from society and leave rational and autonomous subjects to their own devices; rather, it is discursively constructed as an active and facilitating state – acting through society from below, rather than from above. The state thereby seeks to address social problems precisely through the strengthening of democracy at the societal level, on the basis that political problems can only be addressed at the personal or community level through inclusion and social empowerment. As Dean states, once problematized: ‘Individuals are required to agree to a range of normalizing, therapeutic and training measures designed to empower them, enhance their self-esteem, optimize their skills and entrepreneurship and so on’ (2010: 197).

In our complex and globalized world, reflexivity demands that the democratic society is self-constituting without the guidance or direction of a collective will. Self-rule today is not a matter of a return to understandings of ‘direct democracy’ at the level of the workplace or the local community. Democracy is increasingly a question of private or individual cognitive and social capacity rather than political or public representation. The problematic of individual reflexivity is one in which the collective will emerges interactively through the plural operation of democracy in society itself. In this process, the relationship of the public to the formal political sphere is inverted; rather than deliberative reason and representation constituting the public as a collective body, the plural public of the social sphere is enabled and empowered in their ‘everyday’ decision-making capacity as democracy devolves down to the level of the private individual.

As the UK Royal Society for the Arts ‘Social Brain’ project suggests, responding to the problems of the non-linear world is not a matter for government regulation but a concern of individuals as the key decision-makers. The problems of complexity mean that citizens need to be able to reflexively respond to externalities autonomously and responsibly:

[L]ife politics is the politics of choice in a deep existential sense – a politics where one is aware of what it is like to live reflexively in a post-traditional and globalised world . . . Whether we like it or not, in late modernity citizens need to be able to reflexively chart their way through the choppy waters of a globalised economy. And whether we like it or not, they need to find ways of changing the way they live if they are to counteract problems like entrenched inequality and environmental degradation. (Grist, 2009: 16)

In today’s world, governments and international institutions lead the call for more democracy or for the democratization of areas of social life. The call for more democracy tends to put the emphasis on society rather than the state and demands for democracy relate to social responsibilities and responsivities, rather than to making the government

more accountable to the people. A good example is the UK government's experimentation with 'Big Society' in which social problems are addressed through the extension of democracy, empowering active and responsive citizenship, particularly in addressing environmental, social and health problems. As the government website states: 'We think that the "Big Society" is (or should be) a new approach to social challenges . . . We think that in the context of austerity, the government can no longer solve all the problems we face, and neither should it' (Big Society, 2012).

Democracy, we are continually informed, is much more than voting in elections, it is about the public and individuals and their behaviour and understanding on an 'everyday' level. It is the limited capacity of states to cohere policy-making on the basis of a 'general will' that is reflected in understandings of democracy as a societal process. This support for the extension of democracy into the social and informal sphere marks out the non-linear understanding of democracy from the legacy of the linear paradigm of both the pre-modern and the modern world. Non-linear understandings do not operate on the basis of constitutional or institutional solutions to the problem of democracy, the aggregation of interests, or the problem of collective will formation. Rather than making constitutional distributions of rights, the management of pluralist competition, or the checks of legislation or judicial frameworks, the solution, democracy as societal reflexivity works in a different register, on the problematic of the legitimating power of plural and shifting publics as they constitute themselves in the social or private sphere. Rather than starting with constitutional order and rights subjects, non-linear approaches start with the problematic of the social production of reflexive autonomous subjects.

This article attempts to demarcate this linear or modernist approach from that of non-linear and resilience approaches, first, through drawing out the centrality of the separation between the public and the private sphere in liberal modernist frameworks. The following sections then consider the development of non-linear analytical framings. Emphasis is placed on the influential role of Walter Lippmann's sceptical problematic of complexity and non-linearity in the 1920s and on the complementary ideas of 'emergence' stemming from the application of Darwinian evolutionary psychology. It is suggested that non-linear approaches and the shift in understanding of the role and location of the public are then formulated in analogous ways both by the pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, and the neoliberal ideologue, Friedrich von Hayek. In this framework, democracy no longer operates through the constitution of a formal public sphere but rather through the facilitation of private choice-making and personal and community modes of self-government.

## **Democratic reason**

Engagement in the collective deliberation of democratic reasoning has been understood, from the Enlightenment theorists to the present, as the highest exercise of freedom. From Rousseau onwards, the 'general will' was seen to be capable of emerging above corrupting private interests on the basis of the formal constitution of a public as the source of political legitimacy (Rousseau, 1998). Social contract theory established the rational autonomous subject at the heart of the modern liberal democratic doctrine and Immanuel Kant provided probably its most articulate defence. For Kant, the democratic space for

individual freedom and autonomy was that of the public realm, where individuals could act as universal rational subjects in relation to other equally rational beings. It was only in the public sphere that individuals were held to be freed from relationships of obedience and authority, which dominated the private sphere of work (hierarchy of management) or of specialist needs (doctors, financial advisers, etc.). The collective will could only emerge as a product of the exercise of public reasoning, through free and active engagement in discussion and debate in the public sphere (Kant, 1991).

The Enlightenment drew heavily upon classical understandings of the constitution of a democratic collective will through public political discourse, whereby citizens had not just a right but a duty of participation. It was the public sphere of the assembly ‘in which the free existence of a free citizen manifested itself’ (Foucault, 2011: 34). In the pre-Socratic age of Ancient Greece, the key to the link between democracy and the constitution of a collective will was the construction of this artificial sphere, separate from the inequalities and dependencies of economic and social existence. The outcome of deliberation would only be based on persuasion, not on obligation or coercion between unequals, constructing a ‘circular relation’ between public reason and democracy (Foucault, 2010: 155; see also Arendt, 1998; Samons, 2004). Today, few theorists maintain the importance of such a division, understanding a formal realm of democratic discourse as artificially separated from private interests operating in the societal sphere of interaction, although this legacy can be seen in Habermasian theories of dialogic reasoning and communicative rationality (Habermas, 1986; see also Disch, 1997: 152) and in deliberative approaches (Elster, 1998; Gutmann and Thompson, 2004; Fishkin, 2011; Dryzek, 2012).

It is important to emphasize that the critique of the formation of a democratic will is today not couched in conservative or elitist terms, as a critique of democracy, but in support of the extension of democracy to the social sphere through the inculcation of personal reflexivity. The discourse of non-linearity thereby moves beyond the Platonic ‘reversal’, which forms the basis of traditional conservative thought, suggesting that democracy would merely result in mob rule and the corruption of power (Plato, 2007; see also Foucault, 2010: 224; 2011: 61). It also moves beyond the ‘Aristotelian hesitation’, whereby democracy was defended not on the basis of the constitution of a collective will but on the basis of limiting and altering power and thereby negatively restraining private interests (Aristotle, 1992; Foucault, 2011: 46). The legacy of Aristotelian approaches to democracy can be seen today, for example, in John Keane’s conception of ‘monitory democracy’. Here, the role of citizens is not that of public decision-making but of maintaining checks on executive rule, with the use of new communication technologies enabling citizens ‘in big and complex societies’ to scrutinize the workings of power (2011: 214; see also 2009). Keane argues that democracy today cannot be based on ‘heading backwards’ to the Greeks, ‘to recapture the (imagined) spirit of assembly-based democracy – “power to the people”’ (2011: 219). He criticizes contemporary advocates of ‘deep’ or ‘direct’ democracy, like Fung and Wright (2003), who argue that what counts is ‘the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and empowered because they attempt to tie action to discussion’ (2011: 219).

As we shall see below, for non-linear approaches, representation and the control over government are no longer the central concern – rather, it is social processes and interactions

that are at the centre of analysis. In the sections which follow, I seek to draw out the development of today's democratic understandings of the need for a reflexive citizenry; locating the power of self-government not in the formal public sphere but in the social sphere. Crucial to this analytical framing is the scepticism of linear reasoning found in both the pragmatic approach of John Dewey and the neoliberal approach of Friedrich von Hayek. Both these understandings challenged the linear and rationalist assumptions of liberal democratic theory, which as Koopman (2009) notes, even today, 'is still excessively enamoured of state-based rationality'.

## Lippmann and non-linear thinking

The problems of complexity, modernity and democratic reason were firmly articulated by progressive thinkers in the inter-war United States, of which Walter Lippmann was probably the best known and a fundamental influence upon the work of John Dewey. Lippmann was important as a mediating link in the shift of democracy discourses from the public sphere to the social sphere because his critique of the democratic will was not state-based nor was it based on differences in capability between elites and masses. His critique was sociological, based on the complexity of social relations. Writing in the 1920s, the problematic he opened up was of public representation in what we today would call a 'globalized' world. For Lippmann, fixed territorialized communities – or publics – with collective interests or purposes were a liberal fiction or partisan self-deception, instead the public was not static and unified but shifting and plural and could not be understood without being 'put in its place' (1993: 145).

Lippmann's critique of liberal rationalist and linear approaches was not overtly elitist: the problem was not social or educational inequality, which was potentially resolvable through social reform, but rapid change and social complexity. Even the most avid and educated citizen, 'cannot know all about everything all the time, and while he is watching one thing, a thousand others undergo great changes' (1993: 15). The world was moving too fast with too many interconnections for even the greatest of minds to grasp the consequences of public policy-making (p. 17). Moreover, change occurred unevenly, through shifting and clashing temporalities, continually altering the interrelations between variables and causing new and unexpected disharmonies (pp. 72–4). Lippmann was exceptionally clear in the importance of non-linearity for deliberative or rationalist understandings of democratic rule: 'In an absolutely static society there would be no problems. A problem is the result of change. But not of change in any self-contained element ... Change is significant only in relation to something else' (p. 78). As he stated, this meant that problems could not be addressed as singular issues: all issues now were dependent upon 'complex social *relations*' (p. 146). Interrelationality necessarily threw into question linear forms of knowledge or understanding; responses needed to be entirely time- and place- and context-determined: 'This may sound like splitting hairs, but unless we insist upon it we never define a problem accurately nor lay it open successfully to solution' (p. 80).

For Lippmann, linear or deliberative reasoning could not act as a guide to policy-making: even the pretence of collective understanding was an impossible ideal, which could only lead to disillusionment (p. 29). While the public was a fiction or founding

myth, so was the idea that the business of government could be guided by any coherent or collective reason: 'Modern society is not visible to anybody, nor intelligible continuously and as a whole' (p. 32). Lippmann argued that no subject stood above the particular interests and limited understandings of individuals and the narrow range of choices they made. Importantly for what follows, he argued that it was these narrow and individual choices that 'in detail are in their cumulative mass the government of society' (p. 35). The differentiated and plural public only acts as a decision-maker or executive in its immediate choices in the informal social sphere, otherwise it can only indirectly act, by taking sides when issues of controversy enter the public sphere. Popular will, of a shifting and random public of those interested, rarely manifests itself and even then does not itself govern, it merely takes the side of one party or another (pp. 51–2). The power of the public in relation to formal politics was thereby merely fragmentary, transient, passive, indirect and unformulated.

Lippmann's sceptical critique of democratic representation cohered the non-linear and non-rationalist approach, upon which Dewey developed his much more positive understanding of democratic possibilities. Dewey similarly criticized the way liberal theory 'idealized the state' (1927: 5) as somehow a product of collective reason with teleological aims (p. 20) and agreed with Lippmann's view of the impossibility of government knowing or directing the vast associational connections of modern complex societies. Where Dewey differed was merely on the conclusions to be drawn from this (as he stated himself, see 1927: 116, n.1): on the prospects this meant for democracy. If the social and associational sphere was where individuals had executive powers of decision-making, then democracy was alive and well, except it was not where democracy theorists had been looking for it: in the formal political sphere of decision-making. For Dewey, the public was not constituted from on high by governments but socially, through these associational links and the concerns elicited by them. Lippmann was right that the public did not rule from the top down through the mechanisms of government representation: 'We shall not, then find the public if we look for it on the side of originators of voluntary actions' (1927: 18). The public did not rule through a monolithic government of the collective or 'general will'. Instead, the public ruled plurally, through its active executive choice-making in the informal social sphere.

Lippmann's work on the unplanned and organic complexity of the modern polity was also praised by Hayek, who shared the view of the non-linear understanding of democracy in the social sphere as the limit to government. Rather than a linear understanding of democracy as a formal check on power in the public sphere (akin to Aristotelian approaches), Hayek followed Lippmann in arguing that the limits of governmental reasoning needed to be recognized as located in the complex societal sphere of interaction. Hayek's ardent defence of democratic freedoms was therefore not based on classic rationalist understandings of the political subject but on the recognition that only individual freedom enabled reflexive responses to change, by the free subject in society. It is this shift in understanding which was highlighted when Hayek quoted Lippmann's statement that 'in a free society the state does not administer the affairs of men. It administers justice among men who conduct their own affairs' (Hayek, 1960: 388).

While the Platonic 'reversal' and the Aristotelian 'hesitation' established the basis for the linear problematic of democracy and reason in modern liberal thinking – making



institutionalist frameworks, through which representation could be channelled, key – the non-linear paradigm of democracy and representation operates on a different basis. Following Lippmann, the Deweyan and Hayekian ‘inversion’ argued that no coherent democratic will could be formed because the evolutionary nature of society and its inter-relational organic complexity meant social outcomes were emergent and could not be known, predicted or controlled. In this framing, the problem of democratic rule was no longer the formal or constitutional relationship between the elite and the masses but the informal norms, habits and cognitive understandings of social interaction, which were understood to need to become increasingly reflexive, open and adaptable. (This approach was further developed in the new institutionalist economic understanding of the evolutionary paths of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ societies, see, for example, North et al., 2009.)

Dewey and Hayek shared an understanding that reflective or deliberative democratic reasoning in the public sphere could not constitute a collective democratic will but that a different, and non-linear, form of adaptive, reflexive, experiential reasoning could be inculcated in the societal sphere of practical engagement with problems and through individual choice-making, imbricated within spontaneously evolving feedback loops. Democracy could be inculcated in ‘everyday life’, in families, communities and associative attachments, where local experiential knowledge was always superior to the distant dictates of majoritarian rule. Whereas linear reasoning operated on the fiction that a unitary public will could be constructed in the political sphere, non-linear reasoning sought to enable the empowerment of a plurality of publics in the societal sphere.

## **Dewey, Hayek and non-linear reasoning**

Both Dewey and Hayek are understood to be liberal thinkers, usually construed as being from very different (if not opposite) ends of the liberal spectrum – one a progressive anti-market educationalist, the other a neoliberal free market advocate, until recently neglected by left-leaning democratic theorists (see Gamble, 1996) – however, more recent work has highlighted shared aspects between the two thinkers (for example, Mulligan, 2006; Ralston, 2012) and the University of Oregon philosopher Colin Koopman has explicitly argued that now ‘the time is ripe for Deweyans to take another look at Hayek’ (2009). One of the key distinctions was that Dewey, the ‘social reformer’, sought to move beyond the public/private divide while Hayek, the ‘neoliberal’, was often read as being a staunch defender of the public/private dichotomy, with freedom of the private sphere safeguarded through restrictions on the reach of governmental power. However, their distinct normative stances should not be allowed to obscure their very similar ontological framings of the democracy problematic.

What was key to both their work was their scepticism with regard to linear, rationalist approaches to the formation of democratic reason and preference for non-linear societal responses. For pragmatist theorists and for Hayek, liberal rationalist approaches failed to grasp the non-linear nature of human affairs. For both theorists, rationalism was critiqued from two directions: first, they critiqued the Cartesian subject, viewing thought as secondary to and entirely imbricated with being in the world; second, they understood the world of human affairs as complex and transitory, not amenable to central direction or planning. They both thereby shared evolutionary or emergent understanding of politics,

which today reflect well the political sensitivities of our understandings of living in a non-linear world, in which traditional frameworks of democracy and representation no longer seem to fit.

As Hodgson (2006) points out, both Dewey and Hayek were strongly influenced by Darwinist understandings and were resolute in their hostility to behaviourist approaches. Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection was understood to fundamentally challenge religious ideas of the uniqueness of man (the human/nature divide) and the Cartesian dualism of thought and being (see the excellent treatment in Rogers, 2012). The application of Darwinism to theories of the mind led to the development of evolutionary or emergent understandings, whereby thought and reason were understood to evolve from inherited and acquired predispositions. William James, the founding father of pragmatist philosophy, distinguished instincts as phylogenetic (inherited) and habits as ontogenetic (acquired or learned), both of which preceded and shaped reason and understanding (James, 1957). In this framing, the unconscious mental processes provided the platform for the more highly developed conscious processes: the past, both genetically and environmentally, therefore heavily weighed upon the present. In this way, both the classical liberal modernist understanding of the autonomous rational subject and the radical social science view that consciousness was determined by underlying structures, with subjects as merely the bearers or intermediaries of their social relations, were rejected (see further, for contrasting views, Latour, 2007; Althusser and Balibar, 2009).

The removal of both Cartesian rationalism and determining social structures was vital for the shifting articulation of democracy away from the emphasis on the public political realm. How subjects responded to changes or crises was therefore neither a matter of autonomous rationalist reflection nor a matter of government engineering (ensuring that the right stimulus or incentive would elicit the desired behaviour). Subjects were innately 'political' in the sense of being self-directed decision-makers, however, the frameworks, through which those decisions were made, owed much to both evolutionary psychology and to societal habits and norms (in a similar phenomenological framework to that of Edmund Husserl, 1970). For both Hayek and Dewey, reasoning was not something separate from experience and social practice: reasoning was not a rationalist reflection upon the world but a response to the world based on associational norms and experiences.

Dewey was particularly forward-looking in his critique of the liberal 'individualistic' mythology of man as an autonomous rational subject, which he saw as a contingent and post-hoc justification for the American and French Revolutions, dependent on Newtonian metaphysics and its import into economic *laissez-faire* understandings (1927: 84–92; see also Dewey, 2008). As Dewey wrote:

[S]ingular beings in their singularity think, want and decide, *what* they think and strive for, the content of their beliefs and intentions is a subject-matter provided by association. Thus man is not merely de facto associated, but he *becomes* a social animal in the make-up of his ideas, sentiments and deliberate behavior. *What* he believes, hopes for and aims at is the outcome of association and intercourse. (1927: 25)

Although Hayek was often mistakenly understood to be an advocate of rationalist individualism, his advocacy of the free market was not based upon the reasoning autonomy

of the subject but, in fact, upon a critique of the classical rationalist assumptions of *homo economicus*. For Hayek, like Dewey, human reasoning was merely a phenomenological product of ‘interpretations’ based upon inherited and learned experiences that mediated between the experience and the response. For Hayek: ‘we cannot hope to account for observed behaviour without reconstructing the “intervening processes in the brain”’ (1952: 44). Hayek turned to psychology to explain how internal differentiations facilitated varying responses to events or crises, particularly to those that were unfamiliar or unexpected. According to Hayek, brains were complex, integrated networks but they were also malleable and capable of adaptive change, depending upon the extent to which ‘phylogenetic’, inherited patterns and connections, and ‘ontogenetic’ aspects, acquired by the individual during the course of their lifetime, interacted (1952: 80–1). von Hayek’s work on the psychology of the brain focused on how human responses were shaped through resilience and adaption, in ways that were little different to any other living organism:

The continued existence of those complex structures which we call organisms is made possible by their capacity of responding to certain external influences by such changes in their structure or activity as are required to maintain or restore the balance necessary for their persistence. (Hayek, 1952: 82)

Individuals, especially more complex organisms like humans, would respond differently to external stimuli in ways that enabled them to react differently. Often these reflexive differences would not be intentional but arbitrary or accidental. The key point for Hayek was that differential experiences and reactions necessarily resulted from the innate practical experiential differences of individuals and the complex interaction between their ‘*milieu intérieur*’ (internal, mental environment) and their external, societal environments (1952: 109). This evolutionary or emergent understanding of reflexive subjectivity was to map well onto current understandings of the problem of governing complexity (see further, Chandler, 2013).

Hayekian and Deweyan perspectives understood reasoning and intentionality as neither existing independently of, nor prior to, social engagement but as emerging through inherited and social structures: reason thereby developed adaptively. Instead of understanding reason as a reflection or representation of reality in thought, Dewey argued that reasoning was a product of the ongoing practical interaction of subjects with their environment (2007: 21). Reasoning was therefore not ‘deliberative’ or ‘rationalist’ but an acquired capacity to respond and to adapt to the world. For Hayek, too, it was implicit or tacit knowledge, which was key to reflexivity and to the construction of decentralized and efficient complex orders (Ralston, 2012). For both authors, there were no dualist understandings of subject–object relations at either the individual or state level. Neither individuals nor states were seen to be autonomous goal or target-setters, engaged in means–ends instrumentalism. Both therefore argued against foundationalist understandings and understood democracy as a process of societal experimentation and adaptive learning.

The two key aspects of this anti-rationalist understanding (drawn out well in Koopman, 2009) are those of process and plurality. There was no single universal or rational order: neither that constituted by the objective structures of the world (which

we can only partially perceive through our limited practical experiences and desires), nor that imposed by some Cartesian rationality (as our subjective understandings and desires are similarly shaped by our societal associations, customs and habits). Reason was thereby an evolutionary process of plural experiences and understandings: reason, like society, was a self-organizing and emergent social product. There was no possibility of going beyond this to some monistic view of knowledge, somehow standing outside and independently of our social attachments. The human world was one of complex social interactions with contingent and emergent outcomes beyond human reasoning or control from above.

For Hayek, the most adapted and complex social, legal and political institutions resulted from human action not from human design: they were self-organized or emergent. These societal institutions therefore were not established on the basis of instrumental rationalism and lacked any ultimate end or purpose; evolving through social practice as a framework of often tacit rules and customary norms, shaping the citizens' habitual and unreflective practices. Of course, for Hayek, the most important of these institutions was the market, which, following Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', was held to regulate the complex transactions of society much more efficiently than any government could do through planning. The operation of the market – as allocator of goods and services and the provider of symbolic guides (prices) for decision-making – was seen to be the key institution through which individuals were able to make executive decisions and choices and through this to constitute an emergent institutional order.

Of course, it could be argued that Hayek overstated the divide between the rationality of the market and the irrational 'fatal conceit' of government regulation (Hayek, 1991). However, the alternative to the failings of market rationality from the Deweyan pragmatist perspective would not be that of state intervention, but the highlighting that market rationality is itself determined by society's democratic ethical commitments. As Koopman (2009) argues, through democratic ethical reasoning, society could ensure that markets worked more efficiently, for example, through ethical consumption raising the demand for organic, locally-sourced, labour-friendly, fair-trade products. The critique of market rationality did not necessarily lead to a state-based solution but, logically, to a society-based solution. For Dewey, as for Hayek, states with their means-ends considerations and limited knowledge were powerless before the real sphere of democratic reason: society. It is increasingly from within this framework of social, inter-subjective, moral and ethical development, that democracy is understood to be furthered today.

## **After representation**

Dewey and Hayek both prefigured the 'life politics' of postmodernity through their emphasis on societal interaction and the process of reflexive decision-making in the 'everyday'. It is important to highlight that the critique of political rationalism inevitably meant that the political subject was embodied in social and environmental attachments and it is at this level that democratic reflexivity needs to operate: upon democracy as an ethic or way of life. Democracy cannot be a product of rationalist deliberation as if thought was somehow distinct from practice, if it is to mean anything it has to enable society to be responsive to contingencies arising from human association. Both Dewey

and Hayek speak to us today because of the different register of their sensitivity to the problems of politics. These are not those of individual or collective rights or of needs and desires, as in rationalist discourses, but the unintended problems of association (which differ according to the complexity of each society across time and space) (Dewey, 1927: 33). This associational power is self-generated, emergent, unintended, and unknown except for its consequences, which can be traced back and understood (Dewey, 1927: 32, 106).

The problems for both thinkers did not involve the formal politics of representation but the social understandings and reflexivity elicited from the contingent and unintentional effects of association. The problem was one of emergent social reasoning not rationalist 'political' reasoning. Politics was therefore a process of responding to concerns regarding these externalities, which constituted pluralist publics with a stake in their resolution (1927: 73). This complexity, driven by technological change, was described well by Dewey:

Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence having a common interest in controlling these consequences. But the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, they have formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself. (1927: 126)

For Dewey, like Giddens (2002), it was a 'runaway world', whereby 'man has suffered the impact of an enormously enlarged control of physical energies without any corresponding ability to control himself and his own affairs' (1927: 175). Once this control could no longer be regained through the construction of a state-based deliberative public, the only solution was that of the construction of a pluralized public, reflexive about its associative connections and 'responsive to the complex and world-wide scene in which it is enmeshed' (1927: 216). This public was not formally politically constituted and thus operated on both local and global levels – 'while local, it will not be isolated' (p. 216). The solution to the runaway world of extended associational powers was not that of state regulation or formal representation, but that of developing interactive social responsibilities. If anything, Dewey could be read as arguing that the separation of the public sphere from the social one was the key barrier to unleashing social reasoning – the real intelligence which was already embedded in social interaction and could not be articulated as long as it was forced to take artificial political forms. Social interactive ties made conscious and reflective could then provide real democratic reasoning (p. 219). It is here that the 'life politics' of Giddens (1994) and Beck (1997) or the actor-network theorizing of Latour (2007) can be seen to provide models for resilience as a framework for governing in a non-linear world.

For both Dewey and Hayek, the sphere of reason was not located in the artificial public realm of government and representation but in the private and informal realm of societal interaction. Yet neither of these thinkers advocated the freedom of the private and informal realm on the basis of reason as rationalist knowledge but rather on the basis of the contingency of understanding and the need to inculcate adaptive learning. Both

considered how adaptive learning could be facilitated by governing institutions, rather than considering the state as an executive, decision-making actor. For Dewey, ‘the regulations and laws of the state are . . . misconceived when they are viewed as commands’ as if the state directly represented the Rousseauian ‘general will’ (1927: 54–5), there was no politically-constituted subject capable of directing and controlling society:

Rules of law are in fact the institutions of conditions under which persons make their arrangements with one another. They are the structures which canalize action; they are active forces only as are the banks which confine the flow of a stream, and are commands only in the sense in which banks command the current. (Dewey, 1927: 54)

Dewey and Hayek (1960) both understood the modern state to be an enabling state rather than a directing or decision-making state, through the preference for constitutive rules rather than regulatory ones (Dewey, 1927: 54; Hayek, 1982: 169–95; see also Rawls, 1955; Searle, 1969). What the state enabled was social reasoning: the true democratic reason. In this emergent and evolutionary understanding, states played a role analogous to that of custom or habit, providing the framework for decision-making in the informal, private, sphere but not dictating it; enabling social experimentation and adaptation to take place in the social sphere. The meaning of democracy was transformed from the representation and contestation of views and preferences in the deliberative public sphere to democracy as a mode of being or a mode of life: democracy as adaptive learning in the societal sphere.

## Conclusion

The work of Dewey and Hayek prefigured the post-1990 understandings of how politics and democracy needed to be reworked in the post-political age, after the perceived decline of the linear politics of Left and Right, which had shaped liberal modernity since the French Revolution. What is particularly important to note is that, in non-linear understandings, power is located not at the level of the state but at the level of society itself. It is this shift that enables a new type of political solution to problems; not addressed to the question of institutional mechanisms of representation at the state-level but to problems as they are democratically reframed at the societal level.

In traditional liberal rationalist frameworks, the problem of state policy-making was understood to be the limited capacity of the public to understand (or to be interested in) the complexity of government policy-making and therefore to hold government properly to account as representing the public will – this is the traditional Aristotelian view, replicated at some points (more negatively) by Walter Lippmann in *The Phantom Public* and engaged with anew (more positively) in John Keane’s advocacy of ‘monitory democracy’. In Aristotelian framings of the problem, the solution was that of reworking public accountability at a smaller community level of decentralized power, making mechanisms of accountability more simplified or transparent or increasing the educational or informational knowledge of the public. All these responses presupposed traditional state-based rationalist understandings and operated around the problematic of representation with the growth of political communities and the complexity of government.

Institutional changes were envisaged, or the public were to be educated or empowered, in order for the mechanisms of representation to work more efficiently; for the liberal promise of government as representing the ‘will of the people’ to be reaffirmed.

As long as we lived in the world of political contestation – of Left and Right – with state power at the centre of political life and contested by (at least two) rival ideological understandings, given shape and coherence by political party organization and social contestation, the problem of representation was at the centre of democratic theorizing. Today, we no longer live in such a world, and with the decline of state-based understandings of politics we have seen a revival of evolutionary, emergent, and non-linear understandings, which no longer have the problematic of representation at their heart. When government authorities and policy think tanks talk of giving ‘power to the people’ today, they do not necessarily discuss ways of developing more efficient mechanisms of representation.

Democratic politics in a non-linear age is less concerned with representation than with the development of social reasoning. The ‘power’ which ‘the people’ are seen to require today is social empowerment: the power to take reasoned and responsive decisions in their everyday lives. This capacity to think autonomously and responsively in a world of change and of complexity is the power of resilience. In this framing, there is no limit to the extension of democracy through social capacity-building, the ‘powering’ of communities or the empowerment of decision-making individuals. Once the problematic of constituting the public will is seen to be the responsibility of the pluralized public itself, in its continual emergence, we are all enjoined to the democratic task of working on ourselves and reflecting upon our own attachments and responsibilities to those around us. The personal is indeed political, once democracy is freed from its formal bounds of representation.

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## **Notes**

1. By ‘non-linear’, I am describing a broad range of approaches which highlight the limits of formally constituted political power to shape or wield control over the complexity of social interaction. The modernist construction of politics as separate to or as dominant over the social and economic is questioned and the effects of power are understood as contingent, problematic or counter to the intent of ruling elites (see, for example, Giddens, 1994; Richards, 2000; Beck, 2007; Latour, 2007; Mitchell, 2009; Connolly, 2011).
2. I chose these authors as they are leading liberal theorists of democracy and complexity and all three are enjoying a revival of interest today, for precisely this reason. On Hayek (see, for example, Pennington, 2003; Greenwood, 2010). Lippmann and Dewey are explicitly drawn upon today by authors seeking to question liberal assumptions about the division between politics and economics and drawing upon ‘new materialist’ framings, *Science and Technology Studies*

(STS) and actor-network theory (ANT) (see, for example, Marres, 2005; Latour, 2007: 162; Bennett, 2010: 100–4).

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