

# **The Minimalist Conception of Democracy as informed by The Works of Schumpeter, Riker, and Hardin.**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines what has become increasingly classified as the minimalist conception of democracy, in an effort to define the minimalist conception, evaluate the contributions of Joseph Schumpeter, William Riker, and Russell Hardin, and assesses the impact on democratic theory of grouping these and other theorists together.

The idea that minimalist theory is a tradition of democratic thought which shares a common theme has been forwarded directly only once, by Adam Przeworski, and mentioned in passing by several critics, but has never been examined in depth or defined. Chapter one gives a brief survey of minimalist theorists and defines minimalist theories as those that conclude that any normative value found in substantive democratic outcomes is insufficient to justify democracy.

Chapters two and three examine the works of the two most influential minimalists, Schumpeter and Riker, respectively. These chapters examine the minimalist aspects of both theorists and note that, in entirely unique manners, both reach the minimalist conclusion. Chapter four examines the relatively recent works of Hardin, noting several similarities between his theories and those of Schumpeter and Riker. Hardin is found to satisfy the definition of minimalism and make several unique contributions to minimalist theory, most notably by synthesizing Schumpeter's understanding of individual political competence with Downs's rational voter theorem.

In the conclusion, chapter five, it is argued that there is merit to considering all minimalist theories as a single conception of democracy as theories that contradict the minimalist conception, as defined in chapter one, often attempt to dismiss one minimalist theorist, but ignore the others, to the detriment of their work and to democratic theory in general.

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Patrick Thomson,  
September, 2007.

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# **Chapter One:**

## **Introduction**

The normative value of democracy is of vital importance to the successful practice of democratic government, as any moral justification will imply ways in which democracy's value may be magnified or squandered. William Riker, for example, thinks that democracy is justified by, or that its value is found in, the individual liberties guaranteed by open political competition and that the institutional concentration of political power will undermine those freedoms and therefore devalue democracy.<sup>1</sup> John Dryzek, as a contrary example, thinks that democracy should provide for the rational discussion of alternatives and the reflection of any decisions in public policy; accordingly, he thinks that competitive discourse must be emphasized in the public sphere and that a functioning civil society is vital to "the authenticity of democracy."<sup>2</sup>

These two theories conflict fundamentally and irreconcilably: Dryzek thinks that discussion and the popular control of government is the *raison d'être* of democracy, while Riker concludes that popular control of government is impossible<sup>3</sup> and that believing otherwise leads to tyrannical government.<sup>4</sup> If one theory were, unbeknownst to humanity, correct, then attempting to practice the other's ideal democracy would lead to normatively bad, immoral, or unjustifiable governance.

For example, Gerry Mackie, believing Riker to be incorrect, charges him with unintentionally undermining democracy. After comprehensively refuting Riker's conception of democracy, Mackie finds that Riker's conclusions can be used to support undemocratic forms of government, stating that "the alternate conclusion is that if democracy is irrational and fraudulent, then those with energy, character, and intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> William Riker, *Liberalism against Populism* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, [1982] 1988), p. 249-253.

<sup>2</sup> John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 249.

should impose their interpretation of the objective public interest.”<sup>5</sup> As illustrated, normative democratic theories not only refute the correctness of opposing theories, but usually find that those theories’ faults will lead to democracy’s eventual demise.

It is important to note, in order to understand the scope and severity of their conflicts, that normative democratic theorists are concerned not with situational or conditional judgments or justifications, but with the guaranteed normative value of the democratic form of government—value that must necessarily exist when democracy is practiced, and is therefore intrinsic from democracy in general. Most theorists, from the time of Rousseau to the present day, have sought to define and explain democracy as a form of government that is morally good, irrespective of any externalities.<sup>6</sup> Even those who deny such claims, like Joseph Schumpeter, do not dispute the ability of democratic governments to be normative goods, but argue that democracy cannot always, in every situation, be valuable, or, synonymously, that democracy is not of intrinsic normative value.<sup>7</sup>

Most theorists concede the possibility of opposing theories being circumstantially valid; Riker, again as an example, acknowledges that it is possible for an electorate to express, and govern by enacting, a collective opinion.<sup>8</sup> However, as he finds that any collective expression may also be corrupted and/or irrational, Riker concludes that democracy as a form of government cannot be unconditionally normatively justified

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<sup>5</sup> Gerry Mackie, *Democracy Defended* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 430.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Charles Frankel, ed, (New York: Hafner Press, [1762] 1947), p. 26. Rousseau justifies his ideal form of democracy because “the general will is always right and tends always to the public advantage.”

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, [1942] 1962), p. 242.

<sup>8</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 235.



because it gives force to public opinion.<sup>9</sup> He does not deny that, in any given context, the electorate could return a rational, un-manipulated decision, but only that this result is far from guaranteed. This denial is a sufficient refutation of normative justifications founded on the democratic facilitation of popular control of government because these theories purport to justify the abstract and general form of democracy, not any specific application.

Given the fundamental differences of competing understandings of democracy, Francis Fukuyama may have prematurely pronounced the end of history. The twentieth century triumph of liberal democracy did not end the search for the superior form of government, but did, at least for the present, narrow that search to varying conceptions of democracy. If democracy is to persist, and remain superior to other forms, it must be thoroughly understood and practiced wisely. For this reason, the debates of normative democratic theorists, although rarely if ever seen as such, are of the utmost importance to the survival of the world's liberal democratic societies.

Recently, normative democratic theory has seen the emergence of a classification of theories—minimalist democratic theory—that contains some of the most influential and controversial theorists. This grouping of theorists, which includes Schumpeter and Riker, is not a school of thought or continuous body of work, but is a retrospective (posthumous, in the cases of the aforementioned) grouping. As has been briefly mentioned above and will be demonstrated below, minimalist theories contradict other normative theories in ways that fundamentally impact the practice of democratic government. Minimalism is a conservative doctrine that finds most arguments about democracy's accomplishments or entailments to be unrealistic, and that justifications

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<sup>9</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 238-9.

based on anything other than democracy's ability to ensure the possibility of rotation in office actually undermine its legitimacy. Despite this noted importance, there has been little discussion of, and no works exclusively concerning, a definition of minimalist democratic theory or the characteristics common to these theories.

Adam Przeworski, the only self-identifying minimalist democratic theorist,<sup>10</sup> defines the minimalist conception as: “a Schumpeterian conception of democracy.... [Which maintains that] democracy is just a system in which rulers are selected by competitive elections.”<sup>11</sup> In doing so, he does not accept the entirety of Schumpeter’s arguments; unlike Schumpeter, Przeworski finds reason to unconditionally value democracy above other forms of government. He concludes that elections, although not a reliable source of rational, representative, fair, or just outcomes, do guarantee peaceful changes of government and contribute to democracy’s survival.<sup>12</sup> This synthesis of Schumpeter’s conception with Popperian justifications appears to constitute a definition; according to Przeworski, minimalist theories are those in which democracy is justified in a manner that does not contradict Schumpeter’s conclusions concerning the value of democratic decisions.

Shaun McElhenny, an undergraduate student of Russell Hardin, provides some insight, but stops short of providing a definition. He identifies Schumpeter, Popper, Riker, Hardin, and Przeworski as minimalists because their conceptions do not place

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<sup>10</sup> Shaun McElhenny, “Minimalist conception of democracy: a normative analysis,” (Honors Thesis, New York University, 2004), p. 3. [www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/undergrad/research/mcelhenny\\_thesis.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/undergrad/research/mcelhenny_thesis.pdf) retrieved September 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Przeworski, “Minimalist conception of democracy: a defense,” in Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon, eds, *Democracy’s Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 23-55), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 44-45.

conditions on democratic outcomes—they must not necessarily be fair or representative, for example.<sup>13</sup> McElhenny does not provide a definition because he is concerned with classifying existing democratic governments based upon their use of institutions consistent with the minimalist conception; he is able to determine which institutions are consistent with the minimalist democratic theories he examines without defining the concept itself.

Albert Weale, though he makes no mention of minimalism, provides perhaps the closest thing to a definition of minimalist conceptions in his explanation of liberal constitutionalism, which he identifies with both Riker and Schumpeter. He states that liberal constitutionalism, also referred to as protective democracy, “[emphasizes] the capacity of electorates to turn politicians out of office, rather than [emphasizing] their capacity to achieve an expression of their views in public policy.”<sup>14</sup> As evidenced by his explanation, Weale, like McElhenny, is concerned with classifying forms of government, not the underlying or implied democratic theories. It is clear however that the value of democracy, as envisioned by liberal constitutionalists, is found in the turn-over of elected officials and little else.

Although he does not provide a definition, either, William Riker, likely coining the term, provides further understanding. In the conclusion of his seminal work, Riker states that his conception of democracy “may seem a *minimal* sort of democracy, especially in comparison with the grandiose (though intellectually absurd) claims of populism.”<sup>15</sup> This statement illustrates a common feature of all allegedly minimalist theories: in comparison with other, non-minimalist conceptions, they find relatively less

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<sup>13</sup> McElhenny, “Minimalist conception,” p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Weale, *Democracy*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 244. Italics added.

normative value in democratic government.<sup>16</sup> By virtue of this characteristic, several theorists who do not necessarily draw upon each other's work, or even address similar aspects of democratic government, have been classified as minimalist theorists.

Still, within this seemingly general grouping, there exist several commonalities. Despite a variety of influences, approaches, and assumptions, conceptions that place relatively less value on democratic government tend to reach conclusions which are comparable beyond merely being relatively minimal. Through surveying the works of Schumpeter, Popper, Riker, and Przeworski—theorists who find, relative to non-minimalists, less normative value in democracy—and the works of Dahl, which share several characteristics with these theorists, it may be possible to discern a definition of the minimalist conception of democracy.

Joseph Schumpeter is the original minimalist. Max Weber, who thought that the existence of conflicting values precludes a moral justification of political decisions; that the electorate possesses little capacity for political rationality; and that electoral competition is of primary importance to democracy, predates Schumpeter but is concerned with many other issues and does not draw conclusions concerning the value of democracy.<sup>17</sup> Schumpeter, building upon these ideas, though not explicitly, develops the conception of democracy found in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* [1942].

Schumpeter finds that fundamentally conflicting values within societies and the lacking political faculties of the general electorate refute eighteenth and nineteenth

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<sup>16</sup> Minimalist justifications of democracy are not refuted by other theorists, but are added to. It is hard to think of, or imagine, a justification that denied democracy's ability to prevent tyranny and guarantee basic personal freedoms. So, while minimalists rely on the above points as justifications, non-minimalists add further points. This is why minimalists are said to find less value in democracy than other theorists.

<sup>17</sup> David Held, *Models of Democracy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 157-178.

century democratic theories, in which democratic elections are a means to discovering the common good or a public will. According to Schumpeter, political decisions are so complex that individual electors can not be expected to devote sufficient effort to forming rational political opinions and are more likely to form irrational opinions or have their opinions manipulated against their own interests. Furthermore, even if individual irrationality is overcome, it is unlikely, due to value-based differences, that individual opinions could be aggregated into a coherent public opinion. For these reasons, Schumpeter concludes that democracy is not a means of identifying a public will, but a method for the competitive selection of rulers.

Believing himself to have dismissed all theoretical grounds for finding value in democracy, Schumpeter concludes that democracy is not always valuable, stating that;

There are ultimate ideals and interests which the most ardent democrat will put above democracy, and all he means if he professes uncompromising allegiance to it is that he feels convinced that democracy will guarantee those ideals and interests such as freedom of conscience and speech, justice, decent government and so on. [This is because] democracy is a political *method*, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political—legislative and administrative—decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself.<sup>18</sup>

Insofar as he is not an unconditional democrat, Schumpeter differs from all other theorists to be examined; each of whom find some intrinsic value in democratic government, where Schumpeter maintains that any value found in democracy is dependent upon its satisfaction of external normative criteria.<sup>19</sup> However, the central thesis of Schumpeter's conception, best understood as "a sustained attack on the...view

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<sup>18</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>19</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

which sees democracy as a means for expressing a popular will,”<sup>20</sup> does not necessarily conflict with other minimalist theories that find intrinsic value in democratic governance.

Karl Popper, like Schumpeter, was an Austrian ex-patriot writing during the Second World War who treated democracy briefly as part of a much larger work. It is not Popper’s dismissal of more grandiose democratic conceptions that causes him to be considered a minimalist, but his decision to support democracy over other types of government for its propensity to prevent tyrannical government, and for that propensity alone. He states that democracy, as the only type in which governments can be changed “without bloodshed,”<sup>21</sup> is preferable to all other forms of government, and that “the various equalitarian methods of democratic control, such as general elections and representative government, are to be considered as no more than well-trying and ... reasonably effective institutional safeguards against tyranny.”<sup>22</sup> Although he does not dismiss conceptions of democracy based upon the “intrinsic goodness or righteousness of majority rule”<sup>23</sup> on which he chooses not to base his defense of democracy, Popper makes statements suggesting that he found these conceptions of democracy untenable.<sup>24</sup>

As noted by Przeworski, who defends his minimalist conception on “Popperian” grounds,<sup>25</sup> and as can be observed in the works of others, the value of avoiding tyranny and bloody revolutions can be attributed to Schumpeterian understandings of democracy, in which the results of the democratic process are of no intrinsic value. Schumpeter, who

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<sup>20</sup> David Miller, “The Competitive Model of Democracy,” in Graeme Duncan, ed, *Democratic Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 133-55), p. 137.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Volume 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1945] 1969), p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol 1, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society* Vol 1, p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Volume 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1945] 1969), p. 160. Popper states that “Democracy can not be fully characterised as the rule of the majority... For a majority may rule in a tyrannical way.”

<sup>25</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 23.

expressly finds no intrinsic value in democracy,<sup>26</sup> conceives of the freedoms required for the conduct of competitive elections in a manner which renders democracy and tyranny compatible.<sup>27</sup> However, these loose definitions are not fundamental to the Schumpeterian conception of democracy, as evidenced by later theories that maintain similar understandings of the value of electoral results but find value in democracy's characteristic prevention of tyranny.

William Riker, by basing his conception of democracy on social choice theory, developed an entirely original approach to normative democratic theory and ignited at least two decades of heated theoretical debate. Riker attempts to “study the relations of democratic means with democratic ends,”<sup>28</sup> by exposing what he believes to be the two prevalent understandings of democracy to the conclusions of Kenneth Arrow's *Social Choice and Individual Values*, which proves that it is impossible to aggregate individual preferences into a single group preference in a method that is both fair and rational. Riker demonstrates that, in order to guarantee a rational outcome, all currently-used electoral systems are somewhat unfair, and that, in situations where an ideally fair electoral system—the Condorcet system—would produce an irrational outcome, different electoral systems are liable to produce different outcomes from identical groups of individual preferences.<sup>29</sup> Although it rarely occurs naturally, it is possible for this situation to be created by manipulation of the democratic decision-making process, and

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<sup>26</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>27</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242. Schumpeter states that disenfranchising and oppressing minorities can be “decided on according to the rules of democratic procedure.” In his opinion, these rules do not prohibit such tyrannical actions. See page 26 of this thesis for a complete explanation.

<sup>28</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 115.

as important political decisions often have consequences sufficient to motivate such manipulation, it is probable that this situation occurs frequently.

This analysis leads Riker to conclude that, as the results of any election may or may not be arbitrary, any value found in democracy cannot be dependent upon the coherence or meaning of election results.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Riker finds that democracy is valuable because its existence guarantees the individual freedoms necessary to the conduct of free elections.

Adam Przeworski, a self-identifying minimalist, constructs, with reference to half a century of democratic discourse, a conception of democracy very similar to that of Schumpeter. He examines the possibility of democracy's value arising from its ability to produce normatively desirable conditions, using the identification of social welfare maxima and the creation of representative government policies as examples. Przeworski finds that the likely existence of conflicting interests within a society precludes the existence of a social welfare maxima—essentially a common good.<sup>31</sup>

Przeworski also thinks that the representation of public interests or opinions is beyond democratic government. The absence of clearly defined mandates, the existence of dynamic conditions requiring mid-term changes in policy, and the impossibility of fully informing the electorate prevent the representation of opinions or interests by any democratic government.<sup>32</sup> Przeworski, concluding that they can not ensure representative or social welfare maximizing governance, states that theories which value democratic

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<sup>30</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 239.

<sup>31</sup> Przeworski, "Minimalist conception," p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Przeworski, "Minimalist conception," p. 34-38.



electoral decisions for their satisfaction of “other normatively desirable and politically desired criteria” are likely also untenable.<sup>33</sup>

Instead, Przeworski argues that the “possibility of being able to change governments,” and “being able to do it by voting,” have normatively valuable consequences.<sup>34</sup> The alternation of governing powers, even if arbitrarily distributed, encourages rulers to act somewhat responsibly, as they can expect reciprocal treatment when eventually removed from office.<sup>35</sup> Also, the prospect of regaining power in the future encourages defeated rulers to accept their loss of power and support continued democratic government. The democratic alternation of power is significant because voting “indicate[s] limits to rule;”<sup>36</sup> it provides insight into the limits of the electorate’s acceptance of government rule, ensuring that open revolt can be avoided.

This brief survey reveals the existence of single unifying commonality; all theories examined conclude that any normative value found in substantive democratic outcomes is insufficient to justify democracy.<sup>37</sup> Schumpeter and Riker provide the best known and most informative examples of this characteristic. Schumpeter thinks that individuals are unable to form rational opinions consistent with their interests, and,

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<sup>33</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 46.

<sup>36</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that, although minimalists are primarily concerned with electoral outcomes, they find no justifying value in any substantive outcomes. For example, deep deliberative theorists such as Habermas and Cohen eschew electoral outcomes but find value in the outcomes of public discourse, which they maintain to be central to democracy. Minimalists, who think that individuals can not rationally represent their own interests or that the conduct of genuine discourse is impossible, also refute any value that may be found in this type of outcome.

therefore, that decisions resulting from their opinions can not be normative goods.<sup>38</sup>

Riker reaches an identical conclusion by examining the process of deriving a collective decision from multiple individual opinions and decides that the realities of opinion aggregation and the probability that the decision-making process will be manipulated will result in manipulated or irrational electoral outcomes.<sup>39</sup> Przeworski, for a variety of reasons,<sup>40</sup> endorses this conclusion, while Popper, as discussed above, maintains an identical position but does not present any argumentative justifications.

Several theories share an additional commonality. Almost all theories examined find normative value in the existence of fair and competitive election. However, as Schumpeter expressly does not find intrinsic value in democracy, this idea cannot be definitional. Riker and Przeworski provide the most explicit examples of this characteristic. Przeworski, finding value in a modernized Schumpeterian understanding of democracy, judges democracy's value to be found in the possibility of government turnover, a possibility guaranteed by the existence of free and fair elections.<sup>41</sup> Riker finds that the conduct of free and fair elections requires the existence of certain individual freedoms that are themselves valuable.<sup>42</sup>

Both theorists find some value in democratic outcomes; however it is of a very different nature than the value found by non-minimalists. Przeworski and Riker value the potential for electoral results to cause changes in government, where others maintain that democracy can produce other desirable results, such as governments that aspire to

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<sup>38</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 253-264. The point is stated as a hypothesis on page 253 and answered in the following pages.

<sup>39</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 238-9.

<sup>40</sup> See page 10 of this work.

<sup>41</sup> Przeworski, "Minimalist conception," p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 8.

achieving a social welfare maxim or common good, or representing the interests of the population. However, although Riker does think that democratic outcomes can prevent tyranny and result in non-violent transfers of power, he does not think that outcomes will always produce such a result.<sup>43</sup> He therefore does not rely on this possibility alone, primarily justifying democracy for its assurance of individual liberties. Similarly, Przeworski finds that the non-violent alternation of power is good because it encourages restraint and mutual respect; power may or may not be transferred, but the potential for transfer produces results that normatively justify democracy.<sup>44</sup>

Minimalist theorists find value in the existence of outcomes—the necessary production of winners and losers—not in their indicating or influencing anything other than the leaving of office by one faction and the assuming of office by another. Conversely, other normative democratic theorists find substantive value in democratic outcomes; they think that democratic outcomes can dictate government policy in a way that produces normatively valuable results. To clarify, substantive outcomes are democratic outcomes which mandate a particular government action or policy; examples of substantive outcomes include referenda results, legislation enacted by a legislative body, and mandates that are often read into the election of a party or candidate. Non-substantive outcomes are, more or less, the defeat and election of opposing parties, considered separately from any perceived mandates or policies that may arise from the success of one party over another.

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<sup>43</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 243. He states that democracy only makes it “*possible* to reject a putatively offending official.” This rejection may or may not occur and the outcome is only valuable when it does occur.

<sup>44</sup> Przeworski, “Minimalist conception,” p. 45-49. This moderation is essential to Przeworski’s valuation of democracy—the bloodless transfer of power between tyrants could hardly be deemed valuable.

The theories of Robert Dahl provide an interesting and informative contrast to the above-examined minimalist theories. Although not a minimalist, Dahl presents a conception of democracy that has influenced and been somewhat endorsed by both Przeworski and Riker.<sup>45</sup> Like Schumpeter, whose analysis of democracy he finds to be “excellent” despite being “somewhat defective,”<sup>46</sup> political competition is the exclusive focus of Dahl’s *Polyarchy*. It is by virtue of this characteristic that he is referred to by, and on occasion grouped with, some of those considered minimalists.<sup>47</sup>

Dahl reserves democratic status for “an ideal system,” instead identifying existing democracies—“imperfect approximation[s] of [this] ideal”—as “polyarchies.”<sup>48</sup> Though democracy may involve other factors, any government in which citizens are, for the most part, enfranchised and able to run for public office is considered a polyarchy. Dahl thinks that polyarchy is superior to less-democratic forms of government because open political competition necessarily guarantees certain individual freedoms, discourages tyrannical government, and encourages responsive government.<sup>49</sup>

The responsiveness of Dahl’s polyarchy is not a direct product of the electorate’s expressed desires, but a result of the competition for political power. Politicians “adapt rhetoric, program, policy, and ideology to what are thought to be the desires or interests of [the electorate].”<sup>50</sup> The responsiveness of government policy depends upon the initiative of those holding or seeking elected office and the electorate’s reaction to the

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<sup>45</sup> Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 15.  
Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 132.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 131.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Carole Pateman, in *Participation and Democratic Theory*, discusses Dahl’s polyarchy as an extension of Schumpeter.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Dahl, *Polyarchy*, p. 20-30. Dahl poorly articulates these values as six separate benefits of polyarchy.

<sup>50</sup> Dahl, *Polyarchy*, p. 23.

various alternatives. The people do not necessarily hold or express concise opinions, but are able to rank competing platforms, which in turn are based upon the public's anticipated reaction. Still, if responsiveness to the interests or desires of the public is to be considered valuable or good, the expression of the public interest—a democratic outcome or product—must be somewhat valuable.

While finding democracy less valuable than many others, this conception of democracy—which Dahl's polyarchy is, despite his best linguistic efforts—attributes more value to democratic government than any of the other examined theorists and clearly differentiates him from minimalist theorists. As previously noted, while Riker and Przeworski also find some value in democratic outcomes, the normative value they attribute to substantive outcomes cannot provide a moral justification for democracy. In Riker's case, democratic outcomes are valued because they provide the possibility of preventing tyrannical government, but are expressly not valued for any influence they exert on government actions or policies. Similarly, Przeworski finds value in the alternation of power—in existence of outcomes, the electorate's allocation of power, the outcome, may be good or valueless;<sup>51</sup> the normative value of democracy is found primarily in the fact that power can alternate, and not in the specific exercise of that power. Dahl, however, concludes that government responsiveness, which, despite being driven by the actions of legislators, is dependent on the value of public opinion, is an independent normative justification of democracy.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Przeworski, "Minimalist conception," p. 45-9. As with Riker, the outcome will sometimes, or circumstantially, be good, but intrinsic value is found elsewhere.

<sup>52</sup> Dahl, *Polyarchy*, p. 20-23. Dahl does not explain why he thinks responsiveness is valuable and it should also be noted that he provides several independent justifications of democracy.

Dahl's entire body of work includes several other moral justifications of democracy. Assuming that it is desirable for "humans to be moral beings," Dahl argues that democracy is valuable because participation in the democratic process facilitates the development of individual moral autonomy.<sup>53</sup> This autonomy is developed by allowing people to live under rules of their own creation,<sup>54</sup> a feat that is absolutely dependent on democratic outcomes being an expression of public opinion. If democracy is to be justified for its creation of a moral citizenry, then democratic outcomes, electoral or otherwise, must be rational, meaningful, and, therefore, inalienably valuable.

Dahl demonstrates that democratic theories that focus on electoral competition, as opposed to welfare maximization or deliberative discourse amongst others, do not necessarily come to minimalist conclusions. Both Przeworski, who defines democracy as "a system in which parties lose elections"<sup>55</sup> or "a regime in which those who govern are selected through contested election,"<sup>56</sup> and Schumpeter, who defines democracy as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote,"<sup>57</sup> think, expressly in Przeworski's case,<sup>58</sup> that their definitions are minimalist. Although all minimalist conceptions may conceive of democracy as a form of government defined by electoral competition, this characteristic is not definitional of democratic minimalism, as it does not exclude theories such as Dahl's.

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989), p. 91. The value of democratically facilitated personal development is also discussed in: Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 35-61.

<sup>54</sup> Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and The Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> Przeworski *et al*, *Democracy and Development*, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 269.

<sup>58</sup> Przeworski *et al*, *Democracy and Development*, p. 14.

Dahl also presents a further, far more reasonable, argument for valuing substantive democratic outcomes. All minimalists deny the existence of, or possibility of identifying, a common good or social welfare maxima, a claim upon which most of their conceptions are founded. However, the absence of a common good does not prevent the existence of inalienably valuable outcomes. The value of democratic outcomes is unavoidably dependent on their rationality and coherence; if, as Schumpeter and Riker maintain, outcomes cannot be rational, then they cannot be of value. Refuting the existence of a social welfare maxima, although a prominent argument of many minimalists, is not definitional of minimalism, again because it does not exclude theories, such as Dahl's, that find other reasons for valuing substantive democratic outcomes.

As thus far examined, minimalist democratic conceptions can be defined as: democratic theories in which any normative value found in substantive democratic outcomes is not a sufficient basis for a normative justification of democracy. This definition provides for the easy identification of minimalist theories, but is only a starting point for gaining a better understanding the minimalist conception. In order to comprehend fully the arguments, facts, and assumptions that contribute to minimalist theories, a detailed examination of the works of Joseph Schumpeter and William Riker will be undertaken in chapters two and three, respectively. As the two most influential and divergent minimalists, their combined works should provide a comprehensive survey of minimalist positions.

Although he does not directly endorse the minimalist conception, Russell Hardin, according to one of his students, “certainly hints towards it.”<sup>59</sup> His works, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism and Democracy*, which conceives of collective action, including constitution building and democratic decision making; and *Indeterminacy and Society*, which examines situations where individual rationality is dependent upon unknown conditions, address subjects that could impact upon the minimalist conception. An examination of Hardin’s work in light of analysis conducted in the previous three chapters will be undertaken in chapter four, to determine the extent of Hardin’s minimalist tendencies and his contributions to minimalist theory. Lastly, the concluding chapter will examine the minimalist conception of democracy in general, as informed by the three theorists herein examined.

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<sup>59</sup> McElhenny, “Minimalist Conception,” p. 9.



**Chapter Two:**  
**Joseph Schumpeter**

Joseph Schumpeter, writing in 1942, produced a democratic conception that has not yet exhausted its influence. Although he devotes only a subsection of his definitive *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* to the normative value of democracy, his arguments and conclusions helped to “originate a school of democratic theory,” and influenced countless theorists.<sup>1</sup> Schumpeter’s understanding of democracy is the foundation of many minimalist conceptions, and his work is of continuing relevance to minimalist theory and democratic theory in general.

Schumpeter begins his treatment of democracy with a refutation of “the classical doctrine,” which he holds to be the prevalent theory of his time, and which defines “the democratic method [as] that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.”<sup>2</sup> As he explains, this definition maintains that, in all matters, there exist ends beneficial to all people within a polity. Accordingly, every reasonable individual should, through rational argument, be able to identify these ends. The collectively expressed wills of the people, therefore, form the “common will”—a unanimous opinion based upon the common good.<sup>3</sup>

Schumpeter’s many critics point out that his classical doctrine is not a fair representation of any democratic theory; it is an amalgamation of several theories, which does none of them justice.<sup>4</sup> As is evident to anyone familiar with the works of both of the

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<sup>1</sup> John Meadris, ‘Schumpeter, the New Deal, and Democracy’; *American Political Science Review*, 91 (1997), 819-832, p. 819.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, [1942] 1962), p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 250.

<sup>4</sup> Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 20.

Mills, Bentham, and Rousseau, this critique is a valid evaluation of Schumpeter's classical doctrine; his formulation bears more resemblance to the worst excesses of democratic rhetoric than it does a coherent democratic theory. For example, it is clear that Rousseau's theory, like the classical doctrine, is not compatible with representative democracy. However, James Mill, J. S. Mill, and Jeremy Bentham each recognised the important role of representation as opposed to reflection.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, Schumpeter's argument is not impeded by this blatant oversimplification. As Miller puts it, "if we abandon (as we should) the whole idea of a 'classical doctrine', we are left with a sustained attack on... the view which sees democracy as a means for expressing a popular will."<sup>6</sup>

Schumpeter refutes this view using three distinct yet complementary arguments. Firstly, he finds the existence of a common good to be untenable: "This is due not primarily to the fact that some people may want things other than a common good but to the much more fundamental fact that to different individuals and groups the common good is bound to mean different things."<sup>7</sup> Within societies he observes divergent "ultimate values—conceptions of life and what society should be," which are irreconcilable because they "are beyond the range of mere logic."<sup>8</sup> These differences preclude the existence of a common good and, correspondingly, of a will common to all.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>David Miller, 'The Competitive Model of Democracy', in Graeme Duncan, ed, *Democratic Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 133-55, at p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, 'The Competitive Model of Democracy', p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 251.

<sup>8</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 251.

<sup>9</sup> Schumpeter also states (p.252) that, if a common good could be identified, disagreements over the means of realising this good could be as significant as fundamental disagreements. Put another way, it may be possible to identify extremely general common goods, public health for example, but agreeing on specifics would still be impossible.

Secondly, though democracy could no longer be associated with a good or the realization of ideal outcomes, the absence of a common good does not prohibit the existence of a democratic process motivated by a public will—a rational public opinion devised from varying conceptions of good.<sup>10</sup> However, Schumpeter finds that fundamental social divisions, which he attributes to modern social stratifications,<sup>11</sup> will also inhibit the formation of a coherent public will; the probability of this corresponding directly to the severity of the divisions.

The attainability of a satisfactory compromise is doubtful; when the disputed issue is of a quantitative nature, allowing for gradation, a compromise may be possible. However, when addressing qualitative issues, any concessions would likely be equally distasteful to all interested parties. Accordingly, Schumpeter finds it unlikely that “political decisions produced... from the raw material of... individual volitions would represent anything that could in any convincing sense be called the will of the people.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally, in the most intriguing and significant portion of his work, Schumpeter questions the motivation and ability of individuals to form rational political wills independently, by which he appears to mean opinions that are consistent with interests. David Beetham states that, “if the idea of interest-maximization is to deliver a defence of democracy,... then it must contain the implicit assumption that people are the best judges of their own interests.”<sup>13</sup> Schumpeter argues that individuals are not able to identify their own interests—form rational wills—and, therefore, that democracy cannot be valued for giving force to public opinion. This last point is far more intricate than the preceding two;

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<sup>10</sup>Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 251-2.

<sup>12</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 254.

<sup>13</sup> David Beetham, ‘Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization’, in David Held, ed, *Prospects for Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 55-73, at p. 61.

Schumpeter cites studies in crowd psychology, consumer behaviour, and Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management*, before arguing that members of the general public lack the faculties to make sound political judgements and are therefore prone to manipulation.

He provides two examples as evidence of the limitations of human rationality; Gustave Le Bon's study of crowd psychology indicates that individual rationality often becomes compromised in group situations. Also, economic studies of consumer behaviour indicate that individuals are not definite about, and often do not act rationally upon, their respective desires.<sup>14</sup> Schumpeter then offers his own assessment of individual political wills, arguing that individuals can hold definite rational wills about issues "distinguished by a sense of reality or familiarity or responsibility,"<sup>15</sup> but that, outside of this relatively narrow realm of expertise, the individual's feeling of responsibility and perception of reality become increasingly compromised, proportionately reducing the rationality of the individual's will.

It is also important to note that, even in cases where an individual has formed a satisfactory will, rationality is not guaranteed; in accordance with the findings of Taylor, despite intentions of and pressures towards rationality it is possible for inefficiency, or in this case irrationality, to occur.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, wills derived from the individual's narrow area of expertise may prove irrational by virtue of the individual's failure to understand issues beyond that area. For example, voters may genuinely support policies

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<sup>14</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 257.

<sup>15</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 259.

<sup>16</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 258. The principles forwarded in Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* [1911] are known collectively as 'Taylorism', to which Schumpeter refers.

granting them “immediate and personal pecuniary profit,” even if such policies are detrimental to their long-term interests.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, individual political judgements are prone to irrationality and misperception. Furthermore, such weakly formed opinions are vulnerable to non-rational forms of persuasion, the function of which Schumpeter believes to be exactly analogous to that of commercial advertising.<sup>18</sup> These methods of persuasion, like their economic counterparts, attempt to exploit subconscious impulses, create favourable or unfavourable associations, and produce public opinion through repeated assertion, as opposed to rational argument. Further yet, political advertising, as it is termed, is infinitely more influential than commercial advertising, as it is impossible for individuals to comparatively judge political options in the same manner that a consumer evaluates products.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the considerable incentive to distort information in favour of one’s position ensures that a lack of reliable information aggravates the effect of such advertising.

For the above stated reasons, individuals cannot reliably express genuine individual wills, instead articulating what Schumpeter terms ‘manufactured wills’. These wills are an insufficient basis for a conception of democracy founded upon the realisation of a public will. As Schumpeter states: “If...the will of the citizens *per se* is a political factor entitled to respect...it must be something more than an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 260.

<sup>18</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 263.

<sup>19</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 253.

Based on his rejection of the classical doctrine, Schumpeter proposes an alternative theory of democracy—the theory of competitive leadership—which defines democracy as: “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”<sup>21</sup> This definition of democracy is consistent with Schumpeter’s statements concerning the inherent divisiveness, and rational political capacity, of the electorate, as it does not, in any way, involve a public will.

Schumpeter believes his theory to be superior for several reasons, mostly for its correspondence to his observations of existing democratic governments. He finds that what has been termed ‘the elite conception of democracy’ provides a simple means of identifying democratic and undemocratic governments, recognises the role of leadership in policy formation, explains the tendency of democratic governments to satisfy genuine group volitions without resorting to unrealistic ideals, clarifies the necessity of individual freedoms to democracy, acknowledges the electorate’s interim lack of direct political control, and accounts for the difference between a popular will and a majority will.<sup>22</sup>

Schumpeter’s central thesis—that democratic outcomes cannot normatively justify democracy—also encompasses the defining characteristic, the single common element, of minimalist conceptions of democracy. While minimalists find no normative value in policy, or substantive, outcomes, Schumpeter finds no intrinsic value in all democratic outcomes; in doing so, his conception of democracy satisfies the minimalist definition of the previous chapter, as substantive outcomes are a sub-category of

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<sup>21</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 269.

<sup>22</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 269-272.

democratic outcomes. Also, Schumpeter is principally concerned with same substantive outcomes examined by other minimalists. This conclusion is a fundamental aspect of subsequent minimalist theories and the most influential part of his conception, accounting for his impact on minimalist democratic theory.

Briefly summarised, he thinks that, due to fundamental value-based differences, individuals in a society will be unable to agree upon government policy. Also, it is not reasonable to believe that individuals themselves will have well-conceived wills; in fact, they may be induced to support positions against their own best interests. Therefore, as actions based on the expressed desires of the electorate would likely be irrational or inconsistent with the electorate's interests, no normative value can be found in the democratic expression of public opinion.

Two separate but complementary positions contribute to this conclusion: Schumpeter states that there are irreconcilable differences within societies, and that individuals can not be relied upon to form rational wills. Although his evaluation of the individual's political capacity may seem elitist to some, Schumpeter's assessment of what he terms 'human nature in politics' is more nuanced than it initially appears. Though education and cognitive capacity are definitely important and mentioned by Schumpeter, apathy and lacking political interest are his primary concerns.

Schumpeter does not think that most humans are predestined to lack the intelligence required to comprehend political issues, but that there is something fundamental to human nature or at least to existing civilisation which guarantees the prevalence of political apathy.<sup>23</sup> His examples of a lawyer who does not apply his professional abilities to political facts in the same way he would a legal brief and of a

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<sup>23</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 262.



business man who is not bothered by government practices “which he would rather die than suffer in his own office” are particularly revealing.<sup>24</sup> Schumpeter concludes that, “without the initiative that comes from immediate responsibility, ignorance will persist” irrespective of any effort to the contrary.<sup>25</sup>

Their sub-optimal comprehension of political issues leaves the general public vulnerable to irrational forms of persuasion, which lead them to hold opinions contradictory to their interests.<sup>26</sup> The effect of deception on normative democratic theory continues to be disputed, with contemporary proponents and opponents, such as John Dryzek and Adam Przeworski, arguing that deception is conversely mitigated or facilitated by the proposals of deliberative democratic theorists.<sup>27</sup> The longevity of this debate illustrates Schumpeter’s continuing relevance; although his explanation of the political deception and manipulation may be dated, the issue itself remains extremely pertinent.

Drawing upon the works of Wittgenstein and Gerald Dworkin, Emilio Santoro provides a contemporary revision of Schumpeter’s understanding of individual political competence.<sup>28</sup> From these sources, he deduces that “it is the community which establishes what is rationality, what a moral or political value is.”<sup>29</sup> The average citizen is not a party to the community of political decision-makers and therefore “cannot

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<sup>24</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 260-2.

<sup>25</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 262.

<sup>26</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 263-4.

<sup>27</sup> Adam Przeworski, ‘Deliberation and Ideological Domination’, in John Estler, ed, *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 140-60, at p. 141. John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 162.

<sup>28</sup> Emilio Santoro, ‘Democratic Theory and Individual Autonomy’; *European Journal of Political Research*, 23 (1993), 121-43, p. 133-4. Santoro cites Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*; and, Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*.

<sup>29</sup> Santoro, ‘Democratic Theory and Individual Autonomy’, p. 135.

become familiar with the specific language of politics, as Schumpeter emphasizes, acquiring this familiarity implies ‘concentration of a professional kind’ and relegates ‘a man’s other activities to the rank of sidelines.’”<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the political actions of most people are undertaken using a rationality developed in a non-political context; the malleability of individual wills is not due to the electorate’s inevitable stupidity or a lack of experience, save that of being a member of the political community. The applicability of post-modern theories of relative rationality and language to Schumpeter’s ideas confirms his continuing relevance.

Also, as discussed in Chapter one, it is apparent that Schumpeter’s conception of democracy differs from other minimalist theories as it does not find intrinsic value in the existence of free, fair, and competitive elections. Instead, Schumpeter concludes that “democracy is a political *method*, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political—legislative and administrative—decisions and hence incapable of being an end [or good] in itself,”<sup>31</sup> in Schumpeter’s opinion, a restricted franchise can be consistent with the democratic method and any liberal values are separable from democracy.<sup>32</sup> For these reasons, he concludes that democracy is only valuable when these values—“ideals and interests such as freedom of conscience and speech, justice, decent government”—are satisfied,<sup>33</sup> and that in varying situations it may be possible for other forms of government to provide these goods where democracy would fail.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>33</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>34</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 255.

Schumpeter draws several conclusions concerning the practice of democracy from his normative democratic theory. In order for democracy to survive, Schumpeter thinks that democratic governments must be run by high quality politicians and bureaucrats, that the effective range of political decisions must be limited, and that both the general population and political elite must exercise a level of “democratic self restraint.”<sup>35</sup> Although Schumpeter does not make the connection in every instance, all of these conclusions restrict the influence of the average individual, who Schumpeter finds to be politically incompetent.

In a successful democracy, “individuals of adequate ability and sufficient moral character must exist in sufficient numbers” and pursue politics as a vocation.<sup>36</sup> If this criterion is not met, the government will suffer from weak leadership and, like the Weimar Republic, be vulnerable to anti-democratic leadership.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, a well-trained bureaucracy is required to execute the affairs of the state, instruct, and if necessary restrain, the elected governors.<sup>38</sup>

Schumpeter also concludes that the effective range of political decisions—the government’s jurisdiction—must be restricted. The “kind and quantity of matters that can be successfully handled by a government” is restricted by the previously identified theoretical limitations of democratic decision making, by the competence of the legislators and bureaucrats, and by the attitudes and opinions of the electorate.<sup>39</sup> There are some issues, criminal law and currency regulation for example, that should not be influenced by public opinion and so should be delegated to competent bureaucratic

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<sup>35</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 290-6.

<sup>36</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 290.

<sup>37</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 291.

<sup>38</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 293.

<sup>39</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 291.

institutions, and others, those on which people are unwilling to compromise and with the power to destroy the government, which must be placed beyond the reaches of government.<sup>40</sup>

Lastly, Schumpeter thinks that politicians and private individuals must voluntarily moderate the maximization of their political interests and be tolerant of opposing interests and opinions.<sup>41</sup> In the interest of stable government, politicians must be willing submit to opposing positions without fully exercising their powers of resistance. Likewise, voters must “respect the division of labor between themselves and the politicians they elect;”<sup>42</sup> legislators are liable to submit to the lobbying of their constituents, irrespective of its merit, and, therefore, electors must refrain from influencing politicians in-between elections.<sup>43</sup>

Schumpeter concludes that, although governments may deviate slightly from these criteria in practice, their general satisfaction is a requisite of democratic longevity. If they are not met, democracy is likely to produce poor governance and weak leadership and thereby become vulnerable to, and less desirable than, undemocratic forms of government. Alternatively, if democratic authority is not exercised appropriately, democracy may collapse under the pressures of internal conflict.<sup>44</sup> Schumpeter’s conception of democracy is fundamentally important to the practice of democratic government; if correct, his theories provide practical direction for those seeking to found or maintain democratic governments.

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<sup>40</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 292 and 296.

<sup>41</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 294-5.

<sup>42</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 295.

<sup>43</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p., 295.

<sup>44</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 296.

The conception of democracy in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, based upon “the assumption that individuals are not autonomous sources of political orientation,”<sup>45</sup> is of indisputable importance to both the minimalist conception of democracy and the world’s democratic governments and aspiring democrats. Its endurance may be attributed to several factors. Ultimately, it is likely Schumpeter’s commitment to developing a theory founded in reality, based on observable democratic practices, that grants his work a permanence uncommon to early modern democratic scholars. This commitment, observed by critics and contemporaries alike,<sup>46</sup> allowed Schumpeter to recognise the importance of deception and individual rationality before the topics became central to democratic studies, and ensured that his theory, unlike those that examine democracy’s theoretical possibilities, was and is applicable to the study of democracy in both theory and practice.

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<sup>45</sup> Miller, ‘The Competitive Model of Democracy’, p. 135.

<sup>46</sup> Graeme Duncan, Steven Lukes, ‘The New Democracy’; *Political Studies*, 11 (1963), 156-177, p. 165-6. Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14-15.

# **Chapter Three:**

**William Riker**

William Riker, writes Iain MacLean, “was the most innovative political scientist of his generation;” he introduced analytical political science to rational choice theory and concerned himself broadly with grand questions, particularly those posed by American political history.<sup>1</sup> In *Liberalism Against Populism* [1982], Riker evaluates different conceptions of democracy in light of developments in the study of social choice theory, particularly the findings of Kenneth Arrow’s *Social Choice and Individual Values* [1951]. Essentially, social choice is concerned with the aggregation of individual preferences into group decisions. As voting, being such a procedure, is seen by many to be central to the democratic process, this area of study could greatly impact democratic theory.

Though Riker and Schumpeter both reach the characteristic minimalist conclusion—that the democratic process cannot translate public opinion into government policy—they do so through entirely different methods; Schumpeter is concerned with the political limitations of individuals, while Riker focuses on the limitations of combining rational preferences into coherent group decisions. Through integrating the abstract and often mathematically complicated field of social choice with conventional democratic theory, or as he puts it, “study[ing] the relations of democratic means with democratic ends,”<sup>2</sup> Riker reaffirms Schumpeter’s conclusions and inspires several decades of heated democratic discourse.

In *Liberalism Against Populism*, Riker argues that, in accordance with Arrow’s theorem, electoral results may be irrational, and also that they may be manipulated. He concludes that, as any given electoral result may or may not be fairly deduced from the

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<sup>1</sup> Iain MacLean, ‘William Riker and The Invention of Heresthetics’; *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (2002), 535-579, p. 535.

<sup>2</sup> William Riker, *Liberalism against Populism* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, [1982] 1988), p. 2.

expressions of individual electors, electoral results are not consistently valuable and, therefore, their value cannot be relied upon in any moral justification of democracy. After reaching the definitional minimalist conclusion, Riker evaluates democracy's normative value, and, unlike Schumpeter, who assumes that democracy's normative value is determined by the intrinsic value of substantive outcomes, finds that, independent of substantive outcomes, democracy is a normatively preferable form of government.

Riker begins by establishing the centrality of voting to democratic government. With reference to a study of elements common to several representative democracies,<sup>3</sup> he finds participation, liberty, and equality to be the distinctive properties. Popular participation in government is an undeniably necessary aspect of any democracy: "even recent theories, such as those from Dahl and his followers, that equate democracy with the free interplay of groups and the existence of an opposition cannot avoid an emphasis on voting as the ultimate way groups and oppositions make themselves felt."<sup>4</sup> Participation, however, is only democratic if it "facilitates popular choice"—is binding upon the government.<sup>5</sup> The act of voting in isolation is a necessary but insufficient defining element of democracy; it must be combined with freedoms of speech and association and institutions that allow the act of voting to constitute a genuine choice.

Though there is no necessary connection, "rights such as free speech, religious liberty, fair legal procedures, property ownership, and economic security" are entrenched

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<sup>3</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.5. Riker cites a study conducted in William Riker, *Democracy in the United States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1964)

<sup>4</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.5. Riker is referring to Dahl's *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

<sup>5</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.5.



in many historic democratic declarations.<sup>6</sup> Riker states that democracy and liberty are instrumentally associated, the latter being a necessary condition of the former: the free expression of political opposition requires potential minorities not to fear the wrath of the majority.<sup>7</sup> Liberty has become an end itself, but originated as, and remains, an essential instrument of popular participation and, consequently, of voting.

Similarly, equality is an instrumental facilitator of popular government. Identical valuation of each individual vote is fundamental to meaningful political participation: “to permit serious inequality means to deny to some people the chance to the self-control and cooperative management involved in democratic justice.”<sup>8</sup> On similar grounds, this equality can be expanded to include legal equality and equality of educational or economic opportunity.

After cementing voting as the crucial aspect of democracy’s universal features, Riker delves into the meaning of democracy, which he states is both an ideal—self-actualization through self-government—and a method—the process of participation in a free and equal society that results in the realization of the ideal. He finds that there are two distinct interpretations of the meaning of voting, or accounts of what it may accomplish—the liberal Madisonian<sup>9</sup> and the populist Rousseauian views.

“In the liberal view, the function of voting is to control officials, *and no more.*”<sup>10</sup> This perspective is founded upon a fear of tyranny and otherwise poor government, the prevention of which supersedes all other possible functions of democracy. The popular

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<sup>6</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.6.

<sup>7</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> Iain MacLean notes that, although Riker’s liberalism can be sourced to Madison and Riker does not cite Schumpeter, the idea that voting is primarily a method of controlling officials is Schumpeterian. MacLean, ‘William Riker’, p. 538.

<sup>10</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 9.

election of officials to limited terms is the exclusive purpose of voting. Tyranny on behalf of the officials or the majority is tempered by the possibility of electoral defeat by other officials or a different majority. Likewise, officials who fail to satisfy the electorate or become relatively undesirable may be removed. Thus, through voting, the threat to the liberty derived from the democratic process caused by tyrannical or incompetent government is mitigated.<sup>11</sup>

Contrarily, “for the populist, liberty and hence self-control through participation are obtained by embodying the will of the people in the action of officials.”<sup>12</sup> Voting is viewed as a means of discovering the will of the people, and liberty is comprehended as obedience to that will. Although Riker identifies only Rousseau as a proponent of such an understanding of liberty, Robert Dahl, who thinks that living under laws of one’s own choosing facilitates the development of individual moral autonomy—a normatively desirable result—is another such theorist.<sup>13</sup>

The divergent understandings of liberty observed in the populist and liberal views of democracy are the source of their disagreement. Where populist liberty is a product of collective action, liberal liberty results from the restraint of such action. Riker draws upon Isaiah Berlin’s *Two Concepts of Liberty* in examination of these differences. Berlin identifies two distinct types of liberty: positive, realised through personal development, and negative, attained through the absence of interference by others. He finds that a positive understanding of liberty lends itself to tyranny, as a desire for personal

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<sup>11</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 91. It should be noted that Dahl also values individual freedoms, which is consistent with a negative understanding of liberty. It is likely that Dahl does not think the two types of liberty are mutually exclusive, like C. B. Macpherson in *Democratic Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

development translates into a desire for social progress which conflicts with a negative understanding of liberty.<sup>14</sup> Endorsing this analysis, Riker concludes that the populist conception of liberty is identical to Berlin's positive liberty, and that liberal and negative liberties correspond in the same manner.<sup>15</sup> Returning to the subject of voting:

in the populist interpretation of voting, the opinions of the majority *must* be right and *must* be respected because the will of the people is the liberty of the people. In the liberal interpretation, there is no such magical identification. The outcome of voting is just a decision and has no special moral character.<sup>16</sup>

When applied to democracy, the positive and negative conceptions of liberty are related, respectively, to theories that find value in the popular control of government and theories that find value in restraining the powers of government. Positive liberty, in a manner extremely similar to utilitarian welfare maximization, supports finding value in substantive democratic outcomes. Similarly, negative liberty, as it contradicts positive liberty, supports finding no value in substantive democratic outcomes; in fact, if Berlin's argument, that positive liberty is a cause of tyranny, is accepted, negative liberty provides an argument against finding value in substantive outcomes, even if they are rational expressions of the electorate's interests. Accordingly, Berlin's understanding of liberty has profoundly minimalist implications for democratic theory.

Having established the conflicting liberal and populist conceptions of democracy, Riker commences his central analysis—the comparison of these democratic theories with the results of social choice theory. Insofar as it pertains to voting, social choice theory is founded on Arrow's theorem, also known as the paradox of voting, possibility theorem, or impossibility theorem. Arrow found that no method of collectively selecting between

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<sup>14</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.12.

<sup>15</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.14.

three or more alternatives could both satisfy the accepted conditions of fairness and always produce a rational result.<sup>17</sup>

Riker introduces Arrow's criteria of fairness as a part of his exhaustive examination of electoral systems, and summarises them briefly. There are many different formulations of Arrow's theorem. A concise summary of the theorem, as it pertains to electoral results, is offered by Mackie, a critic of Riker, who draws upon the formulations of Arrow, Amartya Sen, and Riker. Essentially, Arrow theorized that no method of collective preference aggregation can guarantee a transitive—rational—and fair outcome, which would satisfy all of the following criteria:<sup>18</sup>

1. *Unrestricted Domain*: Individuals must be allowed to select any “logically possible combination of individual orderings” as their preference—voters must be allowed rank candidates or alternatives in any order they wish.

2. *Pareto Principle*: If every individual prefers one alternative to another, then the collective choice must reflect this preference.

3. *Independence from irrelevant alternatives*: The collective ranking of two alternatives must not be influenced by change in the ranking of a third alternative.

4. *Nondictatorship*: There cannot be one single voter whose preference determines the result of an election irrespective of the preferences of all other voters.

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: John Wiley and Sons, [1951] 1963), p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Gerry Mackie, *Democracy Defended* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 80-2.

5. *Transitivity: A transitive, or rational, outcome is one in which there is a clear ordering of preferences, for example  $A > B > C$ . An intransitive outcome is one in which there is not a clear ordering, for example  $A > B > C > A$ .*<sup>19</sup>

In the context of majoritarian elections with two candidates, these conditions are satisfied and a logical decision is produced.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, most elections are contested by three or more candidates, and those that are restricted to only two candidates employ some form of nomination process which violates condition 1. In elections with three or more alternatives, the majoritarian method is prone to the violation of Pareto optimality, and a host of other electoral systems are liable to contravene at least one of the above criteria.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, as each electoral system violates the criteria in a different manner, different systems may draw different conclusions from identical groups of preferences. Riker contends that this fact results in the choice of electoral system, rather than the preferences of electors, often determining election outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

Of the comprehensive list of electoral systems that Riker examines, there is only one that guarantees the satisfaction of the fairness criteria, but cannot guarantee a rational—transitive—result: the Condorcet system. In this system, the winning candidate, or Condorcet winner, must be preferred to all other candidates in a series of pairwise majority contests; essentially, it extends majoritarian decision-making with two alternatives into situations with three or more alternatives.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, it is possible

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<sup>19</sup> These criteria are summarized from Mackie, *Democracy Defended*, p. 80-1. There are several different formulations of these criteria; Riker, for example, splits conditions 2 and 4 into four separate criteria.

<sup>20</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 101-111.

<sup>22</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 136.

<sup>23</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 67.

that no candidate is preferred to all others in pairwise comparisons, and, therefore, that there is no Condorcet winner. In other methods, violating the principles of fairness ensures the production of a rational result—the selection of a winner—even if a Condorcet winner does not exist.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike all other systems, which violate the criteria of fairness but produce a rational result, the Condorcet system satisfies Arrow’s criteria of fairness but is not guaranteed to return a rational decision.<sup>25</sup> In the event of a ‘Condorcet cycle’, every candidate is defeated by at least one other candidate in pairwise comparisons; there is no winning candidate. The lapse in the transitivity of aggregated preferences—rationality—that occurs when the fairness criteria are satisfied is central to Arrow’s theorem and to Riker’s conception of democracy.

The probability of Condorcet cycling is vital to social choice theory’s impact on democratic theory. If cycles are extremely unlikely to occur in democratic elections and decision-making processes, then Arrow’s theorem is of little relevance. Alternatively, if cycles occur with reasonable frequency, the theorem is significant to democratic theory, and, as democratic outcomes can not be valuable if they are not fair and rational, significant cycling supports a minimalist understanding of democracy.

Riker observes that, assuming a random distribution of preferences, the probability of cycling increases with greater numbers of voters and candidates, to the point where cycling could be expected to occur in most situations. Such estimates are unreliable, however, as “there is good reason to believe that debate and discussion do

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<sup>24</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 101 and 111.

<sup>25</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 120.

lead to... fundamental similarities in judgement.”<sup>26</sup> Riker concludes that “the tendency towards similarity may thus reduce [the probability of cycling], while the possibility of manipulation may increase [the probability of cycling].”<sup>27</sup>

With reference to the works of Duncan Black,<sup>28</sup> Riker notes that when the aggregated preferences produce a single preference peak, then transitivity, and therefore a Condorcet winner, are guaranteed. Single-peakedness<sup>29</sup> occurs when decisions are made in a single political dimension, when all individual voters order candidates along the same spectrum,<sup>30</sup> only disagreeing over the merits of each point on that spectrum. These findings, and those of Peter Fishburn,<sup>31</sup> lead Riker to conclude that:

because of agreement on an issue dimension, intransitivities only occasionally render decisions by majoritarian methods meaningless, at least for somewhat homogeneous groups and at least when the subjects for decision are *not* politically important. When, on the other hand, subjects are politically important enough to justify the energy and expense of contriving cycles, Arrow’s result is of great practical significance.<sup>32</sup>

While naturally occurring cycles may not, according to Riker, occur with any significant frequency, it is possible for cycles to be manufactured through various forms of manipulation. Because they can induce Condorcet cycles, strategic voting and agenda manipulation can be used to alter democratic outcomes in the election of representative, referenda, and the decisions of legislative bodies. Such practices can be observed in

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<sup>26</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 122.

<sup>27</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 124. Riker cites Duncan Black’s *The Theory of Committees and Elections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

<sup>29</sup> The term ‘single peaked’ is derived from images of graphed preference distributions.

<sup>30</sup> For example, a left-center-right political spectrum.

<sup>31</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 128. Riker cites Peter Fishburn’s *The Theory of Social Choice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>32</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 128.

historical democratic decisions and explain the political histories of democratic countries.<sup>33</sup>

Riker demonstrates how strategic voting can and has been used to induce cycling and impose the will of minorities. In his examination of this phenomenon, Riker acknowledges that strategic voting in plurality elections is a form of manipulation. Although, in fact, it offsets Condorcet inefficiencies, caused by vote splitting, in simple plurality elections; if, in a three party race, two parties ally to defeat a third, mutually disliked opponent, it necessarily follows that the defeated candidate was not the Condorcet winner—able to defeat all other candidates in pairwise comparisons—and the victorious candidate is probably, though not necessarily, the Condorcet winner, if in fact there is a Condorcet winner.<sup>34</sup> He does, however, maintain that such strategic voting constitutes manipulation.

Riker correctly concludes that in more complex situations, strategic voting can be manipulative. Notably in American primaries, but also in other candidate nomination processes, it is not uncommon for opponents to vote in a competing party's primary—representative, senatorial, or presidential—for their least favourite candidate, believing that this candidate would lose to their candidate in the election. In this case, the strategic voters act disingenuously to remove a potential Condorcet winner from the final competition.<sup>35</sup>

Riker's best example is drawn from the legislative process. In what does not sound like an uncommon scenario, opponents of a bill—a 1956 federal education funding

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<sup>33</sup> Riker provides further detailed examples of manipulation in his *The Art of Political Manipulation*, though for the purpose of understanding his democratic theory, the examples of *Liberalism Against Populism* will suffice.

<sup>34</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 145.

<sup>35</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 150.



bill—voted for and passed an amendment they did not support—one which would restrict funding to desegregated schools—to affect the defeat of the entire bill. Effectively, there were three options placed before the House of Representatives; fund all schools, fund desegregated schools, or continue not to fund education.<sup>36</sup> Though the absence of complete records of preferences precludes certainty, it is probable that the unamended bill, which would federally fund all schools, was favoured by the majority of Representatives over both alternatives, therefore being the Condorcet winner.<sup>37</sup> But, by strategically supporting the amendment, which would restrict the funding to desegregated schools, opponents of federal education funding were able to eliminate the Condorcet winner, precipitating the victory of their minority position. In the words of former President Truman, “Congress [fell] into the trap which the Republican leadership [had] thus set.”<sup>38</sup> As a majority of Congressmen favoured federally funding all schools and this action did not result from the democratic decision-making process, the democratic outcome was not the will of Congress; therefore, the decision did not make Congress free by virtue of self-control, and cannot be normatively justifiably by a populist, or positive, understanding of liberty.

Strategic voting, including vote trading or log rolling, inevitably occurs in every electoral system and legislative process. Though it can result, or be intended to result, in the selection of the Condorcet winner, it is also used to inhibit the Condorcet efficiency

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<sup>36</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 154; originally cited from *Congressional Record*, Vol. 102, Part 9; the tense was altered from Riker’s citation.

of democratic decision-making processes, “making an election more a game of skill than a real test of the wishes of electors.”<sup>39</sup>

Agenda control, Riker’s other form of manipulation, is divided into two subcategories, one in which those controlling the sequence of decisions manipulate the outcome, the other in which the minority introduces new elements into a decision, resulting in the formation of a different majority.<sup>40</sup> Like the other type of manipulation, agenda control is most prevalent, productive, and obvious in legislative bodies. Both arise from a losing party’s inability to accept defeat, and when combined create a dynamic and malleable environment in which honesty and insincerity are not easily discerned.

Drawing upon the exploits of Pliny the Younger and a social experiment of Charles Plott and Michael Levine,<sup>41</sup> Riker shows how those controlling the sequences of decisions can affect the outcome. Pliny, for example, seeking acquittal in, and presiding over, a murder trial, put three options—acquittal, exile, and death—before the Senate, instead of first holding a guilty/innocent vote, because Pliny knew that a plurality but not majority of Senators favoured acquittal. Had his manipulation gone unnoticed, the suspects would likely have been acquitted.<sup>42</sup> However, those preferring death voted strategically for exile, affecting the selection of the clear Condorcet winner. If Pliny’s manipulation had succeeded, the Senate’s decision could not be justified by the positive conception of liberty. In the modern era, Pliny is replaced by institutions such as the

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<sup>39</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 168. Riker cites Charles Dodgson (aka. Lewis Carroll).

<sup>40</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 170.

<sup>41</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.175. Riker cites Charles Plott and Anthony Levine’s ‘A Model of Agenda Influence on Committee Decisions’; *American Economic Review*, 68 (1978), 146-160.

<sup>42</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.173-4.

House Rules Committee or the Prime Minister's Office, but the nature of agenda setting remains unchanged.

As an aside, Riker is concerned with agenda setting through manipulation of the procedures used to make democratic decisions. Many academics have observed another type of agenda setting, in which the relative importance of political issues to the general public is influenced by media coverage; in other words, "the news media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling their audience what to think about."<sup>43</sup> Although this phenomenon is largely an unintentional by-product of news reporting,<sup>44</sup> it could foreseeably be intentionally induced. This type of agenda setting is not that applicable to Riker's work, as he focuses on the aggregation of public opinion, not its formation, but it does corroborate Schumpeter's assessment of the malleability of public opinion.

From the results of Arrow's theorem and the ensuing manipulation, Riker develops an explanation of political progress, stating that: "the force for evolution is political disequilibrium, and the consequence of disequilibrium is a kind of natural selection of issues."<sup>45</sup> Decisions resulting from a democratic process result from the formation of a majority; this majority is not permanent, however, as the dissatisfied minority will eventually introduce issues that will divide the established majority and precipitate the formation of a different majority. This continuous succession of shifting majorities and inherent absence of equilibrium results in political outcomes depending more upon the resources and ingenuity of the involved factions than on the opinions and

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<sup>43</sup> Maxwell McCombs, *Setting The Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 1. McCombs credits the original formation of this hypothesis to Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>44</sup> McCombs, *Setting The Agenda*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.198.

interests of the general electorate. The manipulative imposition of minority positions ensures, in such instances, that the majority is in fact dissatisfied.<sup>46</sup>

In this political model, leaders competitively create opposing policies and political dimensions in efforts to gain the support of a majority; essentially, leaders or parties compete in a political market place, the relative merits of their platforms determining the victor. However, Riker notes that in most situations the absence of an observable connection between actions and outcomes results in political competition being far from comparable to economic competition.<sup>47</sup> He concludes, based on his assessment of democracy, that:

The world of political issues can thus be better compared to the world of organic nature than to markets. New issues are produced, more or less randomly, just as genetic recombinations are constantly produced, more or less randomly. Some few of the animal and vegetable recombinations find a niche in the environment and survive and flourish; most of the recombinations fail. So it is also with issues. Most find no significant audience and fail; but some are responded to enthusiastically and flourish, even to the point of completely reshaping the environment in which they arose.<sup>48</sup>

The infinite number of variables present in such a system renders concrete future predictions impossible, though the evolution of current and past issues can be determined in hindsight.<sup>49</sup> Factors influencing this natural selection, institutions and constitutions for example, can be identified and assessed. But the fate and impact of an individual issue can not be projected.

In summation, Riker draws two conclusions about voting from his examination of social choice theory:

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<sup>46</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 210.

<sup>49</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 211.

Outcomes of voting cannot, in general, be regarded as accurate amalgamations of voters' values. Sometimes they may be accurate, sometimes not; but since we seldom know which situations exist, we cannot, in general, expect accuracy. Hence we cannot expect fairness either.<sup>50</sup>

...[And] outcomes of any particular method of voting lack meaning because often they are manipulated amalgamations rather than fair and true amalgamations of voters' judgments and because we can never know for certain whether an amalgamation has in fact been manipulated.<sup>51</sup>

In light of these findings, Riker assesses the tenability of the two conflicting interpretations of voting—liberalism and populism—defined at the beginning of the work. As foreshadowed by the title, he determines that the populist understanding, which maintains that popular desires should direct government actions and that this collective sovereignty results in liberty, is irreconcilably at odds with the realities of social choice theory: “if we do not know the people’s wishes, then we can not make them free by enacting their wishes.”<sup>52</sup> The realisation of populist liberty is dependent upon the fulfillment of the people’s wishes, which Riker contends are obscured sufficiently to render “the populist ideal literally unattainable;”<sup>53</sup> the populist ideal is untenable because electoral results—democratic outcomes—are not reliable enough foundation for a normative justification of democracy.<sup>54</sup>

Conversely, Riker decides that the liberal interpretation of democracy is not precluded by social choice theory, stating that:

Populism is supposed to reveal a substantive will, a proposition with content. Yet if voting can fail to reveal such propositions accurately and if we do not and cannot know in any particular instance whether failure has occurred, then none of the propositions supposedly revealed can be believed. Liberalism on the other

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<sup>50</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 236.

<sup>51</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 238.

<sup>52</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 241.

<sup>53</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 241.

<sup>54</sup> By virtue of this conclusion, Riker is considered a minimalist.

hand asks only for a workable procedure—namely, that voting eliminate some offenders—and if it works sometimes, that is enough.<sup>55</sup>

As it requires only that voters have the ability to restrain officials, the possibility of the democratic processes failing to select a favoured candidate—a Condorcet winner—or even, through manipulation or ignorance, approving a popularly disliked incumbent or policy alternative—both Condorcet losers—does not contradict Riker’s liberal conception of democracy, which requires only that rulers can be removed by a decision of the electorate, not that the decision be fair, just, or meaningful in any way. Riker concedes that liberalism provides for “a minimal sort of democracy, especially in comparison with the grandiose (though intellectually absurd) claims of populism,” but maintains that it is a normatively justifiable form of government.<sup>56</sup> Social choice theory does not inhibit the participatory rights, equality, or liberty of a liberal democracy; they are a required element of democratic competition and, therefore, guaranteed by the existence of democratic government, not by the results of that government’s democratic processes.

Riker’s conception of democracy, inclusive of all above theories, is best understood through examination of his cardinal and favourite example: the issue of slavery as a prelude to the American Civil War. Prior to the war, 19<sup>th</sup>-century America was predominantly governed by a “hardy intersectional coalition of agrarian expansionism.”<sup>57</sup> This coalition of “Jacksonian Democracy” and “Jeffersonian Republicanism” included both proponents and opponents of slavery, and survived largely by ignoring the issue and accepting the status quo. Industrialists constituted a minority during this period, and their interests directly opposed those of the agrarian majority on

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<sup>55</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 291. From the text of an endnote on page 243.

<sup>56</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 244.

<sup>57</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 214.

issues such trade tariffs, which would benefit industrial development and harm commercial agriculture if stringent, and vice versa if lenient.

In this context, Riker interprets the developments surrounding an 1819 Bill admitting Missouri to the union and a subsequent amendment that would have banned slavery in the state as an attempt to divide the majority by introducing a new political dimension.<sup>58</sup> Slavery became, for the first time, a significant national issue; the resulting Missouri Compromise, which allowed slavery in the state but prohibited it in the rest of the Northern Louisiana Purchase, preserved the majority coalition while revealing the potential potency of the slavery issue.

The issue was not raised again until near the end of the Jackson administration, when it was revived following the failure of other attempts to divide the large Jacksonian coalition. Riker rejects the commonly accepted explanation of the issue as a product of “secularising religious enthusiasm,” citing the absence of such sentiment during the Missouri Compromise period, the political absence of such similarly motivated issues as women’s rights and penal reform, and the pragmatic moralities of leading abolitionist politicians as evidence of the anti-slavery movement’s political origins. Riker concludes that, “slavery was always an evil but not always a political issue. What made it a political issue was that, by reason of the structure of politics in the mid-1830s, it was to some people’s advantage to place abolition on the political agenda.”<sup>59</sup>

In an ultimately successful effort to defeat the Democrats, the Whigs, themselves composed of both pro- and anti-slavery factions, began flooding Congress with anti-slavery petitions. The Wilmot Proviso, an amendment prohibiting slavery in any territory

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<sup>58</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 213.

<sup>59</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 221.

captured during the Mexican-American War that was introduced repeatedly from 1846 to 1848, affected cross-partisan, North-verses-South voting and likely resulted in Condorcet cycling. On August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1846, though conclusive evidence was not recorded, Riker finds it probable that the existence of two political dimensions, being pro- or anti-war and pro- or anti-slavery, resulted in cycling in the House of Representatives, as none of the three options before the House—increased war appropriations with the Proviso, increased war appropriations without the Proviso, and not increasing war appropriations—were able to defeat both of the other options in pair-wise comparisons.<sup>60</sup> The particular method of selection used resulted in passage of the Proviso, though it later failed to pass in the Senate due to a filibuster.

The Wilmot Proviso is important to Riker because, as an anti-slavery initiative of Northern Democrats, it was introduced for the purpose of dividing the former majority into Northern and Southern factions, an objective it accomplished. Also, the probable cycling in House of Representatives demonstrates the potential for multi-dimensional issues to cause cycling and result in arbitrary outcomes, in this case without manipulation. Though the Jacksonian-Jeffersonian majority was not finally split until 1860, the Proviso establishes slavery as an issue capable of supplanting the dominant agrarian-industrial political dimension.<sup>61</sup>

The 1860 Presidential election was contested by four major candidates: Stephan Douglas, the Northern Democratic candidate (the Democratic Party having split over slavery policy at the nomination convention); John Breckinridge, the Southern Democratic candidate; John Bell of the Constitutional Union Party, founded by former

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<sup>60</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.227.

<sup>61</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.227.



Whigs and others who opposed the Democrats in the Southern States; and Abraham Lincoln of the Republican Party, founded in 1854 by a group of Whigs, Northern Democrats, and Free Soilers.<sup>62</sup> Though the former majority was split, Lincoln's victory did not result from the formation of a new majority; he and the Republicans won by sweeping the heavily populated Northern States while ignoring the rest of the Country.

Lincoln's election was the culmination of an effort to divide the agrarians and create conditions in which industrialist victories would be possible. However, the industrialists were unable to form a majority, only being able to create a polarized multi-dimensional political environment in which the absence of a Condorcet winner necessitated the election of a candidate disapproved of by most electors, whose pro-industrialisation position was, as likely was his war-instigating stance on slavery, a Condorcet loser.<sup>63</sup>

Riker maintains that this example confirms his understanding of democratic government. The slavery issue was introduced, in 1819 and also later, not in response to popular demand, but as tool by which the minority leadership hoped to divide the majority. The majority agrarians were divided by the issue of slavery and, though there remained a large majority in favour of pro-agrarian government, an industrialist was elected; furthermore, his victory was wholly dependent upon the method of vote tabulation. Given such an understanding of democratic government, Riker concludes "that the outcomes of voting are not necessarily fair and true amalgamations of voters'

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<sup>62</sup> The Free Soilers were a short lived anti-slavery off-shoot of the Democratic Party.

<sup>63</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p.232.

values, that these outcomes may be meaningless, and that the majorities that make outcomes are themselves in flux.”<sup>64</sup>

Having completed his inquiry into the ability of democratic means—voting as a method of social choice—to meet democratic ends—the liberal and populist conceptions of democracy—Riker continues to expand upon the implications of his conclusion. He notes that although the two understandings of democracy are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they are created by the construction of conflicting institutions; liberal governments have institutions which divide and otherwise restrain power, where populist governments are designed to facilitate timely, uncompromised, and uninhibited government action.<sup>65</sup>

For this reason, Riker finds that liberal democracy, which does not theoretically prohibit attempts of populist governance, practically precludes such efforts because the institutions required in both instances are mutually exclusive. Also, Riker contends that populism is disposed towards the unfettered concentration of power, and, therefore, is dangerously susceptible to tyranny and succumbing to undemocratic government.<sup>66</sup> Given its observed volatility and absurdity, Riker concludes that democracy must be preserved by avoiding populism and populist tendencies, and that institutions that mitigate this risk are vital to the survival of liberal democracy.<sup>67</sup>

As the concentration of power can erode individual liberties, Riker thinks that power must be divided in order to protect these liberties and ensure the survival of

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<sup>64</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 233.

<sup>65</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 247.

<sup>66</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 247.

<sup>67</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 250.

democracy.<sup>68</sup> To these ends, he recommends institutions such as a multicameral legislature; a division of legislative, executive, and judiciary authority; a division of authority between national and regional governments; and term limits for elected officials.<sup>69</sup> These recommendations result directly from Riker's acceptance of Berlin's analysis of liberty; positive liberty, according to Riker and Berlin, is a cause of tyranny, where negative liberty is truly valuable. Accordingly, Riker concludes that liberty must be preserved by inhibiting the powers of government. Riker doubts that liberal democracy can exist independent of liberal constitutional limitations, instead foreseeing an inevitable transition to populism and eventually tyranny in their absence.<sup>70</sup>

The minimalist conclusion of William Riker's intricate and original conception of democracy is founded upon the unreliability and malleability of democratic outcomes. For outcomes to be valuable, as per the positive understanding of liberty, they must be "accurate [meaning fair and rational] amalgamations of voters' values."<sup>71</sup> With reference to Arrow's Theorem, Riker demonstrates that no electoral method can guarantee both the fair and the rational aggregation of voters' individual preferences. Then, drawing upon historical examples, he shows how the manipulation of political processes can create and exploit situations in which there is not a rational and fair outcome. Accordingly, Riker concludes that, as they are not consistently accurate and it is rarely possible to determine if one is in fact accurate, substantive outcomes cannot be considered intrinsically valuable.

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<sup>68</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 250.

<sup>69</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 250.

<sup>70</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 249.

<sup>71</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 236.

Deliberative democratic theories, which, in refutation of social choice, contend that rational political discourse can result in rational, meaningful, and therefore valuable substantive democratic outcomes,<sup>72</sup> subject the conceptions of Riker and Schumpeter to the same criticism, revealing several commonalities. Deliberative theorists, such as John Dryzek, argue that discussion and debate encourage single-dimension political decisions, in which Condorcet cycling is not possible,<sup>73</sup> in addition to promoting awareness and curbing strategic actions or manipulation.<sup>74</sup> In response, its detractors argue that deliberation can only ensure that people agree on the dimensions of their differences,<sup>75</sup> and that deliberative manipulation can “lead people to hold beliefs that are not in their best interest.”<sup>76</sup> Though deliberative theory’s validity is highly disputed and unlikely to be verified, that deliberative conceptions of democracy conflict with those of Schumpeter and Riker is obvious.

The conclusions of Riker and Schumpeter differ primarily because Schumpeter assumes<sup>77</sup> that any normative justification of democracy must depend on substantive democratic outcomes, while Riker finds an alternative justification. The two theorists’ definitions of democracy—understandings of the conditions that taxonomically distinguish democracy from other forms of government—explain this difference. Riker does not offer an easily quotable, single sentence definition, but examines the three universal elements he observes in existing democratic governments—participation, liberty, and equality—and from them discerns a definition. These characteristics are both

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<sup>72</sup> John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 162.

<sup>73</sup> Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy*, p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> Jack Knight and James Johnson, ‘Aggregation and Deliberation: On The Possibility of Democratic Legitimacy’; *Political Theory*, 22 (1994), 277-296, p. 286.

<sup>76</sup> Adam Przeworski, ‘Deliberation and Ideological Domination’, in John Estler, ed, *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 140-60, at p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> Schumpeter does not consider any other possible source of normative justification.

the means and ends of the democratic ideal, and are all necessary conditions of “significant” political competition.<sup>78</sup>

For elections to be genuinely competitive there must be individual liberties sufficient to free dissidents from fears of oppression, political and legal equality, and universal rights to participation in the political process. For Riker, “voting is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of democracy... [Democratic] voting must be surrounded with numerous institutions like political parties and free speech [and political equality and individual liberties...ext.] which organize voting into a genuine choice.”<sup>79</sup> As summarised from the preceding analysis, Riker defines democracy as a system of government in which rulers are selected by free, equal, and universally open competitive elections.

When compared with Schumpeter’s definition, which is substantively the same save omitting the “free, equal, and universally open” caveat place on electoral competition, Riker’s definition exposes the cause of Schumpeter’s value-neutral assessment of democracy. Schumpeter maintains that it is possible for a country to be both democratic and practice “the persecution of Christians, the persecution of witches, and the slaughtering of Jews.”<sup>80</sup> Based on this understanding, he concludes that democracy is only a “political method” and must produce independently desirable conditions to be of value.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Schumpeter states that the “relation between democracy and freedom is not absolutely stringent and can be tampered with.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Przeworski, ‘Deliberation’, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 6. According to Riker, a democratic outcome (or choice), however malleable and unreliable, is genuine when it is the product of uninhibited individual preferences.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, [1942] 1962), p. 242.

<sup>81</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>82</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 272.

It is clear that democracy, as defined by Riker, can not coexist with minority persecutions; a terrorised minority can not freely and equally participate in competitive elections, and therefore any government, elected or otherwise, that persecutes a minority is not considered democratic. Schumpeter, concluding that democratic competition “will in most cases though not in all mean a considerable amount of freedom of discussion *for all*,”<sup>83</sup> allows governments that disenfranchise portions of their population still to satisfy his definition of democracy. As compared with Riker’s definition, it is this provision alone that leads Schumpeter to conclude that democracy has no intrinsic value. Conversely, Riker’s definition, including free and fair elections and universal enfranchisement as necessary conditions, ensures that democratic government is normatively valuable.

Riker’s and Schumpeter’s normative assessments of substantive democratic outcomes are unified by an acceptance of manipulation as a political fact of life; the manipulation of the decision-making process is central to Riker’s theory, while Schumpeter, to a lesser extent, accounts for the deception of the voting public. Both theorists are ultimately concerned with democracy’s inability to reflect voters’ interests—Schumpeter’s “wills” and Riker’s “values”—in its outcomes. And so, the corruption of individual expressions of interest, either in the mind of the individual or in the process of preference aggregation, is an essential element of both conceptions.

In this respect, both theories also acknowledge the electorate’s political apathy. As illustrated by Riker’s reference to Pliny the Younger, in which Pliny’s attempt to manipulate a vote is thwarted by the strategic voting of opponents who are conscious of his intentions, manipulation becomes more difficult as the electorate’s involvement and

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<sup>83</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 272.

knowledge increases. Yet, Riker thinks that manipulation can be easily accomplished because citizens rarely have access to “perfect” information.<sup>84</sup> Schumpeter, who finds outcomes only circumstantially valuable primarily because electors’ opinions are not reliably consistent with their interests, supports his conclusion by arguing that a high degree of political apathy is an inevitable feature of society. This position is evidently a product of Schumpeter’s focus on existing democratic governments, a focus also observable in Riker’s work.

Ultimately, despite their differences, it becomes apparent that Schumpeter’s and Riker’s normative judgements of democratic outcomes are complementary. Schumpeter’s argument—that individuals do not vote in their own best interests—and Riker’s argument—that votes cannot be aggregated rationally and fairly—result in the same conclusion—that electoral results are not consistent with the “values” or “wills” of the people<sup>85</sup>—and are more compelling in unison than either is in isolation. Although their theories address different aspects of the outcome formation process, both Schumpeter and Riker are united by the conclusion that the interests of voters can be and are consistently corrupted during democratic decision making. This conclusion leads both theorists to find that substantive democratic outcomes cannot reliably justify the democratic form of government, cementing their minimalist credentials.

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<sup>84</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 179.

<sup>85</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 236; Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 253.

**Chapter Four:**

**Russell Hardin**



In *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy and Indeterminacy and Society*, Russell Hardin treats several topics that are addressed by minimalist theories. In the former work, he attempts to explain political order in existing constitutional democracies, where in the latter he examines indeterminacy and its impact on normative and explanatory theories of social interaction. Both of these works impact on the normative value of democratic outcomes and therefore are relevant to minimalist democratic theory. Through examination of his theories, it will be possible to determine whether or not Hardin is, in fact, a minimalist, and assess his contributions, if any, to minimalist democratic theory.

In *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy*, Hardin argues that liberalism, constitutionalism, and democracy are “sociological coordination theories when they work to establish and maintain social order,”<sup>1</sup> meaning that they function practically and structure politics because they coordinate the interests of powerful social groups. Hardin offers this coordination theory, as he terms it, as an explanation of political order.<sup>2</sup> Government structures and institutions are established to serve and mediate the interests of powerful groups. In this work, Hardin seeks to demonstrate that such an understanding of political reality can explain the development and survival of democratic government.

Hardin states that “liberalism is about arranging institutions to allow us to prosper in our own individual ways,”<sup>3</sup> or to pursue individual interests. Constitutions work when

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Hardin, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 1.

and only when they benefit a sufficient quantity of significant interests. Finally, democracy can be practiced if important, potentially divisive issues such as “basic political and economic order,” have been previously, usually constitutionally, coordinated and decided.<sup>4</sup>

Hardin’s thesis is explanatory, concerning “sociological mutual advantage and is not a normative claim that liberalism, constitutionalism, or democracy genuinely serves the full mutual interest (that is, the advantage of everyone).”<sup>5</sup> Institutions and concepts based on interest coordination are not necessarily good or bad, as, for example, governments that infringe on the liberties of weak groups may still satisfy enough powerful interests to retain power, and coordinations “often leave out important but politically ineffective groups.”<sup>6</sup> Once established, interest coordinating institutions survive when their acceptance is in the interests of most and the cost of establishing different institutions is sufficient to deter those for whom dissent might otherwise be rational.<sup>7</sup>

Hardin thinks that coordination “is the central mode of social order in complex modern societ[ies].”<sup>8</sup> In doing so, he disagrees with conflict theorists, like Karl Marx and Ralf Dahrendorf who maintain that coercive class conflict structures society; shared-value theorists, like Emile Durkheim and John Locke, who find that mutual commitment to some type of abstract social contract can explain social organization; and exchange theorists, like Adam Smith and Bernard Mandeville, who think that rational individual interest maximization orders society. Coordination theory, which as it concerns interests

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<sup>4</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 38; emphasis removed.

<sup>6</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 11.

is an extension of conflict theory, concludes that the satisfaction of influential interests is the primary force structuring society.<sup>9</sup> Hardin does not pursue an exhaustive argument in favour of coordination structuring society, but, insofar as it applies to liberal constitutional democracies, presents an interest coordination theory of political order that explains the creation and survival of democratic governments.

Hardin conceives of democracy as occurring in two distinct stages—the democratic creation of a constitution and the democratic decision-making that occurs under that constitution.<sup>10</sup> The crafting of a constitution, according to Hardin, is purely a matter of interest coordination. Genuine coordination occurs between parties with competing but not directly opposing interests, the integration of which will benefit all parties, but potentially some more than others;<sup>11</sup> for example, although they would remain in competition, each of the Thirteen Colonies benefited from the liberalization of interstate-trade provided by the U. S. constitution.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between these interests is constitutionally defined by institutional structures; for example, when deciding upon general political order, institutions, such as a court system and declaration of rights, are typically created to define and protect individual liberties.<sup>13</sup> A constitution is established through the successful coordination of powerful interests and maintained by evolving conventions that ensure continued coordination.<sup>14</sup>

Once a constitution is established, the democratic conduct of elections and the decision-making of representative bodies cannot be examined independently of the

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<sup>9</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 9-12.

<sup>10</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 92-3.

<sup>12</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 140.

constitution. In this context, democracy “works only on the margins of great issues,” those decided by the constitution.<sup>15</sup> As Hardin states:

The few big issues democracy can handle are those on which there is broad consensus—such as the consensuses in the United Kingdom and the United States on fighting World War II.... For conflictive issues democracy can work only against a background of rough coordination on order. Without that essentially prior coordination, democracy is trammled or irrelevant. And even with the relevant coordination on order, if precise theoretical claims are at issue, democracy works only in the sense that it reaches a result—but not in the sense that it gets the right result....

If political divisions cut very much deeper than the marginal issues on which we can democratically compromise, democracy may no longer seem to produce mutual benefits. It then produces major—not marginal—winners and losers. Big disagreements bring [democracy] down. For example, democracy could not handle the conflict over slavery in the United States or the conflict over Algeria in France, and it could not even get off the ground in independent Burundi.<sup>16</sup>

Hardin then explains how other, coincidentally normative, explanations of democracy are incompatible with his understanding of constitutional government.

Conceiving of democracy as a means to popular sovereignty is both normatively and descriptively incorrect:

Popular control fails in principle for two quite different reasons. First, there are the standard problems of social choice, that popular views will commonly not aggregate into a collective view and that individuals will be motivated neither to understand public issues well enough to act on them nor take action even when they do understand them.... Secondly, there is the nature of institutional government. To be effective, government must work through institutions. But the structure and eventually the actions of institutions are substantially unintended consequences, the result of growth and not the outcome of popular choice or even any systematic choice at all.<sup>17</sup>

Constitutional institutions are created expressly to limit the domain of majority decision-making. Court systems and constitutional rights remove issues of justice from

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<sup>15</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 267.

<sup>16</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 276-7.

<sup>17</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 154.

the democratic realm, protecting widespread interests in individual liberties, for example.<sup>18</sup> The decisions of one generation leave its successors with “a set of enabling and constraining institutions” that cannot be easily altered.<sup>19</sup> These institutions change over time, but, due to what might be termed the paradox of sovereignty—a sovereign body must be able to bind its future actions but can not be sovereign if bound by its past actions—institutions “develop over time in ways that cannot be fully controlled by anyone, let alone the polity acting as such,” and so produce outcomes that are not entirely intended.<sup>20</sup> Even when control is exerted, Hardin states that change is often “intra-institutional and evolutionary, . . . opportunistic and conflict ridden” rather than democratic, citing the massive American economic changes after the Civil War and World War II that distanced business interests from the popular arena.<sup>21</sup> Such institutions are democratic only “in the most indirect sense that democratically elected officials have had a hand in their growth.”<sup>22</sup>

This explanation of democratic institutions corroborates the minimalist position. If democratic decisions are made on the periphery of important issues and government actions are heavily influenced by the institutional structure of government, the electorate probably cannot direct the actions of government in a way that, as Dahl and Riker’s positive liberty maintain, will allow them to live under laws of their own creation. It is also unlikely that, through democratic participation, the people will be able to maximize

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<sup>18</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 161.

<sup>20</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 162. The sovereignty paradox appears to be a variation on Russell’s Paradox, but is best described as a Catch 22 problem.

<sup>21</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 162.

<sup>22</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 164.

their interests. Therefore, substantive democratic outcomes cannot be valued for producing such results.

Hardin also maintains that Anthony Downs's theory of the irrationality of voting indicates limits to the responsibility of democratic citizens and precludes conceiving of democracy as a consensual association of individuals.<sup>23</sup> Downs, in *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, demonstrates that the influence of an individual ballot does not justify the effort of voting.<sup>24</sup> In explicit support of Schumpeter's opinion of the individual's political capacity, Hardin expands upon Down's theory, stating that "the crux of citizen responsibility in a democracy is the causal efficacy of the role of the citizen and the individual's justification for acquiring relevant knowledge. If the role is entirely inefficacious, there is no social reason to acquire knowledge and the citizen might rationally remain ignorant."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that increasing the knowledge of the electorate may raise general awareness of conflicting interests and have the "perverse" effect of destabilizing democratic government.<sup>26</sup> This statement is not as perverse as Hardin thinks, as, in order for the acquisition of such knowledge to be rational, the decisions being made must be of immense importance, concerning issues that could precipitate constitutional collapse.

Hardin, however, has a more practical reason for finding a knowledgeable population undesirable: the overall cost of each citizen's knowledge would impact greatly upon the standard of living enjoyed in modern democracies:

The condition of rational ignorance is not blameworthy or somehow immoral or irresponsible. It is a natural implication of the division of labour that makes life

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<sup>23</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 273.

<sup>25</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 167.

<sup>26</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 168.

richer for all of us.... It follows not only that we can at best make limited claims for the responsibility of citizens to participate in democratic government, but also that democracy cannot be justified by appeal to its grounding in substantial citizen participation.<sup>27</sup>

By rationalizing Schumpeter's opinion of the general public's political capacity, Hardin supports Schumpeter's understanding of democracy and its minimalist conclusions. If it is irrational for individuals to be informed of their own interests, the product of their opinions—democratic outcomes—can be intrinsically valuable. For this reason, Hardin finds that conceptions of democracy founded on the value, or rightness, of the decisions made are not reasonably applicable to modern democracies.

The citizenry's rational ignorance precludes claims that democracy contributes to the development of individual autonomy, which incidentally is far better served by un-democratically secured rights to prosperity and physical security.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the contractarian assertion that democratic decisions constitute agreements of value is unfounded.<sup>29</sup> Finally, any notion of sovereign popular direction of government is unrealistic. "One might argue for an ideal conception of democracy, in which all or most citizens knowledgeably participate. But that ideal cannot be used to justify or practically criticize the results of an actual democracy in which participation is heavily subject to the accidental whims of individual interests."<sup>30</sup>

As Hardin paraphrases from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, "it is not what democracy does for us but what happens under it through private agency that is the

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<sup>27</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 172.

<sup>30</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 173-4.

beauty of democracy.”<sup>31</sup> He concludes that, although liberal constitutional democracy cannot guarantee the existence of a good society, and therefore is not necessarily valuable in and of itself, it is arguably necessary “to the structure of a good society.”<sup>32</sup> The mutual advantage, or coordination, theory of democratic government can account for institutions that guarantee reasonably high standards of procedural justice, individual liberty, and economic prosperity, but only in societies in which interests are already highly coordinated.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, “in any real society, mutual advantage can at best explain what happens.... [It] cannot morally justify the results without some strong additional consideration.”<sup>34</sup> Democracy may be justifiable, but it cannot be justified by coordination theory, as it is an explanatory, not normative, theory.

The theories advanced in *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy* support several minimalist positions. Although Hardin does not draw normative conclusions, he dismisses the same basic normative explanations of democracy refuted by William Riker and Joseph Schumpeter. Each theorist, using various methods in works spanning sixty years, rejects the idea that democratic elections allow the popular direction of government in a way that can be considered valuable. In doing so, a number of common themes emerge in their works.

The existence of fundamental social divisions of interests and values are central to the theories of Hardin and Schumpeter. Both agree that such divisions preclude the existence of a single goal or good to which all citizens could agree and aspire, and that

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<sup>31</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 175.

<sup>32</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 320.

<sup>33</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 320.

<sup>34</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 320.



could justify democracy.<sup>35</sup> Hardin, unlike Schumpeter who briefly asserts the existence of fundamental divisions, presents examples of divisions and expands upon their greater impact on the practice of democratic government.

Hardin gives several examples of divisions that have toppled democratic governments, citing recent examples of democratic failure in Rwanda, Burundi, and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, he also invokes two examples from American history, the Civil War and the Great Depression. “In both of these periods, significant numbers of the population seemed to think the divisive issue was the most important issue of the day, so important as to be worth wrecking the government to get the right outcome.”<sup>37</sup> The outbreak of World War II ended the depression and prevented a decisive conflict; the conflict over slavery, however, caused the momentary collapse of democratic government in the United States.

Like Riker, Hardin understands the Civil War as a conflict between the opposing interests of the slave owning agrarians and the Northern industrialists.<sup>38</sup> While Riker only seeks to expose the manipulation of Lincoln’s election and the success of a minority position, Hardin explains the Civil War as arising from a conflict of major interests that could no longer be coordinated.<sup>39</sup> Slavery was an issue on which the South was not prepared to compromise and, as noted by Riker, its profitability had become a threat to free labour and the North economy.<sup>40</sup> As the original compromise and coordination of

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, [1942] 1962), p. 252; Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 152.

<sup>36</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 280-3.

<sup>37</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 286.

<sup>38</sup> William Riker, *Liberalism against Populism* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, [1982] 1988), p. 221; Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 288.

<sup>39</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 286.

<sup>40</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 221.

Confederation was broken, neither the American Constitution nor democracy could decide or mediate the issue.<sup>41</sup>

In this example, Hardin's coordination theory supports Riker's conclusions, insofar as manipulation is encouraged by major divisions. With the economic prosperity of both parties in question, both sides could be expected to pursue whatever methods might lead to victory, including elaborate manipulations of the democratic process and, in this case, war. Also, the resulting victory of the numerical minority, as observed by Riker,<sup>42</sup> confirms Hardin's claim that powerful interests, as opposed to the opinion of the majority, determine the outcomes of issues they deem important.

As they create situations in which democratic governance is impossible, competing major interests necessitate restricting democratic decisions to relatively unimportant issues. Democracy can only function, according to Hardin, on the margins of major issues that have been coordinated into mutually advantageous compromises.<sup>43</sup> The impossibility of democratic decision-making beyond the realm of marginal issues suggests that, in accordance with Schumpeter, irreconcilable divisions also prevent agreement within that realm. Schumpeter theorizes that social divisions impede democratic decisions, making it impossible for democratic outcomes to be in the interests of all citizens, or commonly good.<sup>44</sup> Hardin, because he argues that the forces exerted by divergent interests determine the structure of democratic governments, supports Schumpeter's minimalist conclusions, although he does not draw any normative conclusions himself.

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<sup>41</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 288.

<sup>42</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 229.

<sup>43</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 267.

<sup>44</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 151.

In addition to expanding upon the existence and implications of divisive interests, Hardin also presents a revised version of Schumpeter's understanding of the general population's political competence. As Downs concludes that voting is irrational, Hardin finds that acquiring the knowledge required to make meaningful political judgments is also irrational.<sup>45</sup> By doing so, Hardin provides Schumpeter's position, ultimately an assumption about human nature based on his observations, with a logical grounding. While Hardin develops this theory in refutation of explanations contradictory to his coordination theory of political order, it greatly strengthens the normative conclusions of Schumpeter.

Lastly, Schumpeter, Riker, and Hardin agree that certain institutions and practices are necessary parts of any democratic government. Schumpeter and Riker, who derive their conclusions from the theoretical examination democracy's normative value, albeit with a definite focus on reality, reach their findings in a different manner than Hardin, who endeavours to explain the realistic practice of constitutional democracy and identifies elements essential to its success. Despite their various approaches, each theorist concludes that restricting the legislative powers of government is essential to democracy's survival.

That important interests must be constitutionally coordinated and beyond the influence of electoral democracy is the central theme of Hardin's work. As previously noted, he argues that exposing those interests to democratic decisions would eventually compromise those interests and lead the disaffected groups to rebel against, succeed from, or otherwise terminate democratic government. And accordingly, he maintains that

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<sup>45</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 167.

the existence of a constitution that restricts democratic government and ensures that potentially divisive conflicts do not arise is a requisite of democracy.<sup>46</sup>

Joseph Schumpeter, among other findings, states that for government decision to be at all coherent or fair, the effective range of political decisions must be limited depending upon the characteristics of the society in which it is practiced; although, unlike Hardin, he thinks that legislative bodies must exercise self-restraint.<sup>47</sup> Remarkably, Schumpeter seems to understand instinctively the realities of political order Hardin formalizes fifty-seven years later, stating that:

Democratic government will work to full advantage only if all the interests that matter are practically unanimous not only in their allegiance to the country but also in their allegiance to the structural principles of the existing society. Whenever these principles are called into question and issues arise that rend a nation into two hostile camps, democracy works at a disadvantage. And it may cease to work at all as soon as interests and ideals are involved on which people refuse to compromise.<sup>48</sup>

William Riker thinks that, because democratic decisions are arbitrary and subject to manipulation, and, like Hardin, that they must be constrained by a liberal constitution.<sup>49</sup> He identifies institutions—multi-cameral legislatures, independent judiciaries, divided executive and legislative powers, and term limits—that have been vital to the survival of American democracy.<sup>50</sup> Without such institutions, democracy would be vulnerable to the concentration of power, the erosion of democracy, and, eventually, tyrannical government.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 280-5.

<sup>47</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 291-2.

<sup>48</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 296.

<sup>49</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 250.

<sup>50</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 250.

<sup>51</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 252.

In *Indeterminacy and Society*, Russell Hardin examines indeterminacy that arises from strategic interaction. Indeterminacy is best described as the absence of a definite rational course of action—when there is not a clear rational action in a situation, that situation is indeterminate. Indeterminacy can apply to both collective and individual decisions; Kenneth Arrow, in *Social Choice and Individual Values*, discovered indeterminacy when he concluded that the aggregation of individual interests may yield no clear, determinate, collective interest.<sup>52</sup> In the context of individual choice, indeterminacy exists because choices are made in a social context, where the outcomes depend on the strategic actions of multiple individuals. Because the actions of others can not be foreseen, an individual can only select a strategy, based on the predicted actions of others, that may or may not produce the desired outcome;<sup>53</sup> an individual may act rationally, but there is no certainty that the most rational of actions will produce the desired result.

Indeterminacy impacts a variety of social theories, including those concerned with “justifying government and its actions,” which are substantially clarified by acknowledging their indeterminacy.<sup>54</sup> As they require identifying a good, moral theories, including those justifying democracy, must overcome indeterminacy.<sup>55</sup> Utilitarian theories attempt to render collective choices determinate by summing the benefits and detriments that choice may have for every individual. These theories fail simply because it is impossible to compare personal judgments of utility, happiness, value, welfare, and

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<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, [1951] 1963), p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> Russell Hardin, *Indeterminacy and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 99.

so on.<sup>56</sup> The only plausible additive theory—Coase’s Theorem—functions only when all factors involved have established monetary values, which can be summed.<sup>57</sup>

The only method that overcomes indeterminacy, according to Hardin, is the holistic approach taken by Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes justifies the creation of a government because it will result in an improvement for all individuals,<sup>58</sup> as opposed to additive theories, in which individuals may gain or lose but the whole must benefit; a normative judgment that Vilfredo Pareto would reassert centuries later.<sup>59</sup> Hardin concludes that only actions that result in improvement for all—that are mutually advantageous—can be deemed morally justified.<sup>60</sup> This mutual advantage must be differentiated from the sociological mutual advantage discussed in *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy*; in the former all interests are served where in the latter only powerful interests are satisfied.

It is important to note that the morality of mutually advantageous actions does not render actions that do not serve the mutual advantage, which harm some, immoral.<sup>61</sup>

Deposing a tyrant is not mutually advantageous, as the tyrant will be worse off, but, given

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<sup>56</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 79-80. Coase’s theorem is explained on pages 70 to 74. Coase states that, when there are several alternatives, the one that results in the creation of the most wealth is the best and that making decisions in this way is morally justified if those who prosper from a decision compensate those who suffer from the decision. Of course, such a method can only judge decisions in which all inputs and outcomes can be valued monetarily.

<sup>58</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 13. Although the basic principles of their normative judgments are identical, Hardin differentiates between Hobbes and Pareto. Where Hobbes is concerned with very general or principled agreements, pertaining to a form of government for example, Pareto is concerned with policy decision by a governing body (43). Hardin thinks that Pareto optimal alternatives may not be rational or determinate in a dynamic environment because the result of one Pareto optimal—mutually advantageous—decision will influence the scope, or Pareto frontier, of the next Pareto optimal decision, potentially making the first decision not mutually advantageous (11). Also, it is impossible to judge between multiple Pareto optimal alternatives. As interpreted by Hardin, Hobbes justifies deciding between multiple alternatives when all individuals would prefer any of the alternatives to the status quo, but does not justify the selection of a specific alternative because some will benefit more than others (43). For this reason, Hardin invokes the normative justifications of Hobbes over those of Pareto.

<sup>60</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 52.

the benefit to the oppressed, it is definitely not wrong. As Hardin does note, mutual advantage can only practically be used to justify the creation of a government (applied “ex ante” as Hardin states), as, once socio-political order is established, any change will result in winners and losers.<sup>62</sup>

When most will benefit and the winners and losers cannot be predetermined, actions that result in some individuals being worse-off may be mutually advantageous, and therefore moral.<sup>63</sup> Universal polio vaccination, for example, serves the mutual advantage because it greatly reduce every individual’s risk of infection, although the small percentage that contracts polio from the vaccination, and may not have contracted it otherwise, will suffer. Similarly, criminal justice systems, which discourage violent crimes, are mutually advantageous even though some may be wrongfully convicted, provided that no group is more likely than others to be wrongfully convicted.<sup>64</sup>

Mutual advantage can be used to make only the most general decisions. While the creation of a government can be justified and is a determinate choice, deciding upon a form of government will remain indeterminate, as some will benefit more than others.<sup>65</sup> Most general, and all specific, questions of collective action cannot be resolved by mutual advantage and remain indeterminate. However, it can “be mutually advantageous to set up institutions in advance to do things that could not individually be justified as serving mutual advantage.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 44.

<sup>64</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 52.

“Mutual advantage is a relatively compelling holistic normative principle for social organization—when it applies.”<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, as it is rarely applicable, most decisions must be made in its absence. Hardin states that decisions are made, and society continues to function, despite a lack of normative guidance, through the creation of institutions that produce what Hardin terms “mechanical determinacy.”<sup>68</sup> It may become necessary or pragmatically desirable to enact policies, such as conscription and various welfare programs, that necessitate interpersonal trade-offs. Indeed, “it seems inconceivable that a government that genuinely made society work relatively well could govern without making policies that fail the test of mutual advantage and that therefore reek of rational indeterminacy.”<sup>69</sup> As Hardin states, these institutions facilitate choice in the vast normative no-man’s-land:

We do not genuinely eliminate all of the relevant indeterminacies when we select, fall into, or adapt one organizational form rather than various others, but we do allow ourselves to improve on our status quo ante by simply, mechanically overriding some of the indeterminacies of strategic interaction.<sup>70</sup>

As he concludes that decisions derived from democratic outcomes cannot be morally justified, the theories presented in *Indeterminacy and Society* confirm Russell Hardin as a minimalist. Because of instances of collective indeterminacy, Hardin, like

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<sup>67</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 121. On page 51, Hardin states that insofar as “they suppose that the standard of agreement for setting up a government or constitutional order ought to be far higher than the standards for adopting a policy under that government,” His argument is “partially analogous to that of Buchanan” and Tullock. However, “unlike Buchanan [and Tullock, Hardin] is not making a normative argument about how we should do things. Rather [he] merely note[s] that we might readily agree on an institutional structure in advance as though from a principle of insufficient reason.”

In this quote, Hardin is primarily referring to James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in *The Calculus of Consent*, Volume 2 of the collected works of Gordon Tullock, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., [1962] 2004), Chapter 6.

<sup>68</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 121.

<sup>69</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 52.

<sup>70</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 127.



Riker, asserts that the normative value of democratic outcomes cannot be determined; unlike Riker, he attributes his finding to the impossibility of aggregating individual interests, as opposed to individual opinions. In his earlier work, Hardin refutes justifications of democracy that rely on the value of democratic decisions; the value, in this case, being found in mutual agreement and being refuted by the rationality of political ignorance.<sup>71</sup> In the latter work, Hardin finds that decisions occurring at a sub-institutional level, as democratic decisions are understood in his earlier work, must concern issues that cannot be normatively determined.<sup>72</sup> Democratic outcomes, therefore, are neither good nor bad, and cannot be normatively justified.

Riker, like Hardin, finds that collective indeterminacy renders democratic outcomes normatively neutral. However, where Riker is concerned only with the electoral aggregation of individual expressions, Hardin is concerned with the aggregation of individual interests. This is because Riker is specifically concerned with contradicting theories that value the popular direction of government, while Hardin is concerned with contemporary ordinal utilitarian theories.

Hardin, prior to examining the implications of indeterminacy, finds, by synthesizing the works of Downs and Schumpeter, that notions of popular direction of government are incompatible with the electorate's rational ignorance;<sup>73</sup> instead, he addresses the idea that democratic decisions can be justified because they serve the interests of a majority of individuals. The indeterminacy-focused theories of Riker and Hardin are complementary, differing only because they are developed in refutation of different theories. As he examines a further way in which collective indeterminacy

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<sup>71</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 172.

<sup>72</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 51.

<sup>73</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 167.

affects the value of democratic outcomes, Hardin contributes to and strengthens the minimalist arguments examined in earlier chapters.

Unlike outcomes, democratic institutions are normatively justifiable, according to Hardin, because they serve the mutual advantage. Hardin considers systems of criminal and common law mutually advantageous, and endorses Hobbes' justification of the creation of a state.<sup>74</sup> Hardin would, therefore, find democracy mutually advantageous and brutal authoritarian regimes, in which most people would be better off without a government, not mutually advantageous. Hardin's normative evaluation of the democratic form of government is somewhat similar to Riker's, who finds intrinsic value in the existence of political competition,<sup>75</sup> as he finds the existence of democracy morally justifiable and democratic outcomes unjustifiable. Although, as Hardin's criterion of judgment is unable to discriminate between benevolent dictatorship and democracy, he may find other forms of government justifiable.

As he finds substantive democratic outcomes normatively unjustifiable, Russell Hardin is a minimalist theorist. In both of the works examined, he develops theories that strengthen the minimalist conception of democracy, providing unique theories that corroborate and advance the theories of Schumpeter and Riker specifically, and minimalist democratic theory in general. The theories presented in *Indeterminacy and Society* reveal that Hardin can be classified as a minimalist, while his original contributions to minimalist theory are found amongst the concepts forwarded in *Liberalism Constitutionalism and Democracy*.

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<sup>74</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 47.

<sup>75</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 8.

In his later work, Hardin reviews and endorses the normative theories of Hobbes. Hardin finds that indeterminacy, as it arises from Arrow's theorem, prevents normative judgments that rely on inter-personal comparisons, and, accordingly, that the only way a course of action can be judged moral is if all parties involved benefit.<sup>76</sup> And furthermore, that such a justification can only be applied generally to changes from one condition to another, and not to the specifics of that change.<sup>77</sup> Although he expands this normative judgment and develops a nuanced application, it was originally developed by Hobbes and expanded by Pareto and others. Also, the normative impact of collective indeterminacy on democratic decisions has been noted by Arrow, Riker, and others. In *Indeterminacy and Society*, Hardin ties collective indeterminacy to Hobbes' normative justification and examines indeterminacy's impact on various other theories of social interaction; as part of his larger work, he endorses minimalist conclusions that have principally been reached by others.

In *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy*, Hardin offers a value-neutral explanation of political order. In doing so, he makes two unique contributions to minimalist theory: he provides a rational explanation of Schumpeter's understanding of the general public's political competence, and forwards an understanding of political order that supports minimalist normative conclusions, grounding their theoretical findings in reality.

Hardin's first contribution is, relative to the second, fairly simple. He concludes that, as Downs demonstrates that casting a ballot is irrational, being politically informed

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<sup>76</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 43.

<sup>77</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 43.

enough to form what Schumpeter terms genuine political wills is also irrational.<sup>78</sup> This conclusion is a synthesis of two other theories, but is itself unique, and greatly improves Schumpeter's conception of democracy. Schumpeter, who essentially concludes that democratic outcomes cannot justify democracy because they are produced by individuals who cannot competently assess and act on their own interests, states that individual political competence cannot be improved but does theoretically and categorically refute such a possibility. Hardin argues that if individuals rationally maximize their interests, as they must if substantive outcomes are to be valued for reaching a social welfare maxim,<sup>79</sup> then the negligible influence of a single individual does not justify the cost of being politically competent; an individual's interests are better served pursuing other objectives.<sup>80</sup> Thereby, Hardin improves Schumpeter's theory and its minimalist conclusion.

Hardin's principle contribution to minimalist democratic theory is his understanding of political order. Drawing upon compelling examples from American and European history, Hardin theorizes that politics is ordered—governments and institutions are created, designed, and destroyed—by the interest maximizing actions of powerful groups.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, democratic constitutions are developed to coordinate these interests, which, if democracy is to survive, may not be impeded by democratic decisions.<sup>82</sup>

If Hardin's understanding of political order is correct, it is not possible for substantive democratic outcomes to be valuable because they secure and maximize the

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<sup>78</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 166.

<sup>79</sup> There are other potential reasons for finding value in outcomes, such as the positive liberty refuted by Riker, but interest maximization is Schumpeter's sole concern.

<sup>80</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 166.

<sup>81</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 140.

electorate's interests or because they allow the electorate to be free or develop moral autonomy by living under laws of its own creation. The survival of democracy, or any other type of government, depends on issues of paramount importance being decided and cemented to ensure the coordination of interests of sufficient power to destroy the government.<sup>83</sup> With these issues removed from democratic control, substantive outcomes can, at best, be valued for allowing the popular decision of relatively unimportant issues, and, as the issues beyond popular influence are far more important, such value would likely, although Hardin does not comment conclusively, be an insufficient normative justification of democracy. Furthermore, as allowing for the popular decision of important issues leads to democratic collapse,<sup>84</sup> it is not possible to make substantive democratic outcomes valuable by allowing for the popular decision of such issues.

Hardin's understanding of political order, as it refutes explanations of democratic government that find consistent normative value in democratic outcomes, is a minimalist theory. Hardin's explanation of political order, which is also potentially an explanation of social order, is founded on the tendency of powerful groups to act to protect and maximize their interests. Drawing minimalist conclusions from this fact provides a unique minimalist argument, one that is independent from the theories of Schumpeter and Riker, neither of whom discuss the forces that order politics.

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<sup>83</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 140.

<sup>84</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 280.

# **Chapter Five:**

# **Conclusion**

Minimalist theories maintain that the normative value of substantive democratic outcomes—ones that prescribe specific policies or actions—is insufficient to justify normatively the democratic form of government—find it morally superior to other forms of government. All of the minimalist theorists herein examined—Schumpeter, Riker, and Hardin—are united by their normative assessments of democratic outcomes, although their theoretical approaches are entirely unique: Schumpeter concludes that individuals cannot form opinions consistent with their own interests, and, therefore, that collective decisions cannot serve the collective interest;<sup>1</sup> Riker finds that decisions made by preference aggregation are consistently irrational and, as such, cannot normatively justify democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Hardin presents two separate minimalist positions, and, as the value of democratic outcomes is not central to either of his works, his minimalist stance requires some interpretation. He theorizes that, as interpersonal utility comparisons are impossible, it is only possible to justify a change in the status quo morally when everyone will benefit from any form the change may take, but the morality of deciding on the particular form of that change or of any action in which all will not benefit cannot be determined,<sup>3</sup> therefore, one may conclude that democracy may be found superior to other forms of government, but any specific government policy cannot be judged moral or immoral. Hardin also thinks that the interest maximization of powerful groups can explain political order, including the structure of democratic governments.<sup>4</sup> As Hardin finds that the

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, [1942] 1962), p. 250-268.

<sup>2</sup> William Riker, *Liberalism against Populism* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, [1982] 1988), p. 238-241.

<sup>3</sup> Russell Hardin, *Indeterminacy and Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 41-54.

<sup>4</sup> Russell Hardin, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 12-18.

survival of a government depends on the issues important to these groups being removed from popular control,<sup>5</sup> one may conclude that any value found in democratic outcomes will be less significant to a moral justification of democracy than the value of the undemocratic coordination of powerful interests. Hardin also addresses the value of such democratic decisions and, through his Downsian rationalization of Schumpeter's understanding of the general public's political competence, concludes that substantive democratic outcomes are not intrinsically, normatively valuable.<sup>6</sup>

Each theorist has a different opinion of democracy's normative value. Schumpeter thinks that democracy cannot be valued independently of its outcomes and, as he finds that all democratic outcomes can be normatively good or bad, he concludes that any given democratic government may be a morally superior or inferior form of government, depending on the morality of its outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, Riker concludes that genuine political competition, which is a requisite of democracy, guarantees certain individual liberties and provides the electoral opportunity to remove tyrants, which causes democracy to be a normatively justifiable, morally superior, form of government.<sup>8</sup> Hardin, though his position is inconclusive, reaches a conclusion similar to Schumpeter. As he theorizes that only a change in which all people benefit may be judged moral,<sup>9</sup> Hardin finds democracy superior to a Hobbesian state of nature, but concludes that, in all other circumstances, it is impossible to judge democracy normatively.

Although their normative judgments of democracy and the foci of their theories differ, these three theorists are united by their minimalist conclusions. No aspect of

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<sup>5</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 280-5.

<sup>6</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 165-74.

<sup>7</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 242.

<sup>8</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 241-246.

<sup>9</sup> Hardin, *Indeterminacy*, p. 41-54.



Schumpeter's assessment of social divisions and individual political competence, Riker's examination of collective preference aggregation, and Hardin's understanding of political order or collective indeterminacy is contradictory. And, despite their peripheral differences, the minimalist arguments of each theory do not conflict, and, in fact, are complementary.

Schumpeter's argument that most individuals lack the ability to develop genuine political wills is supported by Hardin's assertion that democratic decisions must be restricted to relatively unimportant issues and that, therefore, the costs of being politically competent exceed the benefits. Also, Riker's finding that individual preferences cannot be consistently aggregated into rational and fair collective decisions provides a further reason why democracy, as Schumpeter attests, cannot produce outcomes that reflect a common good. Similarly, Hardin's understanding of political order, in which the jurisdiction of democratic decisions must be restricted if democracy is to survive,<sup>10</sup> is supported by Schumpeter and Riker, both of whom conclude that, because substantive democratic outcomes are not necessarily reflective of the electorate's interests or opinions, the democratic direction of government must be restricted.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, Riker's normative social choice theory is reinforced by the conclusions of Hardin and Schumpeter. Riker finds that democracy cannot produce positive liberty—freedom through self-direction—because substantive outcomes do not consistently reflect public opinion.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, Riker rejects claims that democracy can contribute to the development of individual moral autonomy, as espoused by Dahl,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*, p. 280-5.

<sup>11</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, p. 296; Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 249-51.

<sup>12</sup> Riker, *Liberalism*, p. 238-9.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 105.

or to individual personal development, as originally attributed to J. S. Mill.<sup>14</sup> Hardin, as informed by Downs and Schumpeter, argues that, if individuals cannot be expected to be informed enough to vote intelligently, that the democratic direction of government cannot contribute to individual autonomy or personal development.<sup>15</sup> Hardin's argument provides a further reason, independent of social choice theory, for concurring with Riker's assessment of democracy.

The significance of this corroboration becomes apparent when observing deliberative democratic critiques of Riker and his contemporaries. John Dryzek and Christian List, in a relatively nuanced deliberative argument, maintain that deliberation can reduce the risk of manipulation and create conditions—single dimensioned decisions—in which Condorcet cycling, which results in irrational collective decisions, cannot occur.<sup>16</sup> Like most, if not all, deliberative theorists, Dryzek and List focus exclusively on refuting Riker's application of Arrow's theorem, and not on the purpose of that refutation—advancing a conception of democracy in which the popular direction of government is valued because it has been discussed and agreed to.

Hardin argues that, because it is rational for individuals to be politically ignorant, their collective opinion and agreement cannot be valuable, in and of itself.<sup>17</sup> Even if Dryzek, List, and other deliberative theorists are correct about Riker and social choice, and individual opinions can be aggregated into a rational collective decision, Hardin finds that that decision—a substantive outcome—cannot normatively justify democracy. The

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<sup>14</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, Currin Shields, ed. (Indianapolis : Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism* , p. 170-2.

<sup>16</sup> John Dryzek and Christian List, 'Social Choice Theory and Deliberative Democracy: A Reconciliation'; *British Journal of Political Science*, 33 (2003), 1-28, p. 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism* , p. 172-3.

theories of Hardin, as informed by Schumpeter, and Riker, corroborate and strengthen one another by providing independent arguments in favour of the same conclusion.

The significance of this corroboration becomes apparent when one observes the precious few instances in which competing democratic theorists examine the theories of Riker and Schumpeter in unison. Joshua Cohen, an intellectual founder of deliberative theory, acknowledges that Schumpeter and Riker belong to “an important tradition of argument” that finds that the “ideal of popular self government is incoherent.”<sup>18</sup>

However, having done so, Cohen fails to recognize Schumpeter’s unique contributions to the tradition; he argues that deliberative institutions can circumvent the problems of preference aggregation, as forwarded by Riker, but fails to consider that, as forwarded by Schumpeter, the electorate may lack the political awareness to arrive at a coherent decision. In fact, it appears as though Cohen is the only theorist to have recognized the necessity of addressing both Schumpeter and Riker when advancing a competing normative democratic theory.<sup>19</sup> And, although he notes the necessity, and although he states that he is not offering a comprehensive refutation, Cohen completely fails to address Schumpeter’s contributions to minimalist democratic theory.

It is likely that prior to Hardin’s revitalization of Schumpeter’s conclusion concerning individual political competence, that Schumpeter’s conception of democracy was not considered of pressing significance to normative democratic theory. And, while Schumpeter may have been assumed too antiquated, Hardin’s democratic theories have

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<sup>18</sup> Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy”, in Alan Hamlin and Philip Pettit, eds, *The Good Polity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, 17-34), p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Weale, *Democracy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 34. Weale notes that there are similarities between Riker and Schumpeter, but does so in a survey of democratic theory and does not present arguments in favour of any particular normative conception.

been circulating for less than a decade, and have yet to be linked to those of Schumpeter and Riker or subjected to scrutiny by detractors of minimalist democratic theory.

The democratic conceptions of Schumpeter, Riker, and Hardin reach the same minimalist conclusion—the normative value of substantive democratic outcomes cannot justify the democratic form of government. Accordingly, as demonstrated above, the conclusions of Schumpeter, Riker, and Hardin cannot be considered independently; the minimalist conception of democracy cannot be contradicted by refuting one theorist independently of the other two.

The minimalist conception of democracy is far more compelling than its detractors recognize. Minimalist theory is most commonly underestimated when opponents of normative social choice theory consider the work of Riker independently but disregard the work of Schumpeter, Hardin, and any other hereto unidentified minimalists. This neglect constitutes a serious flaw in deliberative democratic theory, and potentially other bodies of normative democratic theory, that must be acknowledged and addressed.

As has been demonstrated, the minimalist conception of democracy is at least as valid as competing bodies of theory. In fact, it may be reasonable to conclude that minimalist theory provides a far more realistic valuation of democracy, as it is currently practiced, than other normative democratic theories, particularly because Hardin firmly grounds minimalist conclusions in political reality.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, not only democratic theorists, but those concerned with the creation and structuring of democratic

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<sup>20</sup> Hardin, *Liberalism*. Hardin is concerned with explaining democracy as it is practiced and concludes that it is formed by the forces that structure politics.

governments and with democratic decision-making in the world's functioning democracies should be informed by minimalist democratic theory.

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