

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)

UK philosopher, legal reformer and founder of utilitarianism. Bentham developed a moral and philosophical system that was

government and economics in the UK in the nineteenth century. A supporter of *laissez-faire* economic policy.



arduous labour, and the confinement of women to the private realm freed them from domestic responsibilities. In this light, in fact, the Athenian *polis* could be seen as the very antithesis of the democratic ideal. Nevertheless, the classical model of direct and continuous popular participation in political life has been kept alive in certain parts of the world, notably in the township meetings of New England in the USA and in the communal assemblies that operate in the smaller Swiss cantons. It is also the basis for the wider use of referendums, particularly in relation to constitutional issues, and for new experiments in democracy such as people's panels and electronic democracy.

Protective democracy

When democratic ideas were revived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they appeared in a form that was very different from the classical democracy of Ancient Greece. In particular, democracy was seen less as a mechanism through which the public could participate in political life, and more as a device through which citizens could protect themselves from the encroachments of government, hence protective democracy. This view appealed particularly to early liberal thinkers whose concern was, above all, to create the widest realm of individual liberty. The desire to protect the individual from over-mighty government was expressed in perhaps the earliest of all democratic sentiments, Aristotle's response to Plato: '*quis custodiet custodes?*' ('who will guard the Guardians?').

This same concern with unchecked power was taken up in the seventeenth century by John Locke (see p. 45), who argued that the right to vote was based on the existence of **natural rights** and, in particular, on the right to property. If government, through taxation, possessed the power to expropriate property, citizens were entitled to protect themselves by controlling the composition of the tax-setting body: the legislature. In other words, democracy came to mean a system of 'government by consent' operating through a representative assembly. However, Locke himself was not a democrat by modern standards, as he believed that only property owners should vote, on the basis that only they had natural rights that could be infringed by government. The more radical notion of universal suffrage was advanced from the late eighteenth century onwards by utilitarian theorists such as Jeremy Bentham and James Mill (1773-1836). The utilitarian (see p. 401) case for democracy is also based on the need to protect or advance individual interests. Bentham came to believe that, since all individuals seek pleasure and the avoidance

Utility: Use value; satisfaction derived from material consumption.

Natural rights: God-given rights that are fundamental to human beings and are therefore inalienable (they cannot be taken away).

of pain, a universal franchise (conceived in his day as manhood suffrage) was the only way of promoting 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'.

However, to justify democracy on protective grounds is to provide only a qualified endorsement of democratic rule. In short, protective democracy is but a limited and indirect form of democracy. In practice, the **consent** of the governed is exercised through voting in regular and competitive elections. This thereby ensures the accountability of those who govern. Political equality is thus understood in strictly technical terms to mean equal voting rights. Moreover, this is above all a system of constitutional democracy that operates within a set of formal or informal rules that check the exercise of government power. If the right to vote is a means of defending individual liberty, liberty must also be guaranteed by a strictly enforced separation of powers via the creation of a separate executive, legislature and judiciary, and by the maintenance of basic rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Ultimately, protective democracy aims to give citizens the widest possible scope to live their lives as they choose. It is therefore compatible with *laissez-faire* capitalism (see p. 183) and the belief that individuals should be entirely responsible for their economic and social circumstances. Protective democracy has therefore particularly appealed to classical liberals and, in modern politics, to supporters of the New Right.

Developmental democracy

Although early democratic theory focused on the need to protect individual rights and interests, it soon developed an alternative focus: a concern with the development of the human individual and the community. This gave rise to quite new models of democratic rule that can broadly be referred to as systems of developmental democracy. The most novel, and radical, such model was developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In many respects, Rousseau's ideas mark a departure from the dominant, liberal conception of democracy, and they came to have an impact on the Marxist and anarchist traditions as well as, later, on the New Left. For Rousseau, democracy was ultimately a means through which human beings could achieve freedom (see p. 300) or autonomy, in the sense of 'obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself. In other words, citizens are 'free' only when they participate directly and continuously in shaping the life of their community. This is an idea that moves well beyond the conventional notion of electoral democracy and offers support for the more radical ideal of direct democracy. Indeed, Rousseau was a strenuous critic of the practice of elections used in England, arguing in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1913) as follows:

The English people believes itself to be free, it is gravely mistaken; it is only free when it elects its member of parliament; as soon as they are elected, the people are enslaved; it is nothing. In the brief moment of its freedom, the English people makes such use of its freedom that it deserves to lose it.

Consent: Assent or permission; in politics, usually an agreement to be governed or ruled.

General will: The genuine interests of a collective body, equivalent to the common good; the will of all provided each person acts selflessly.

However, what gives Rousseau's model its novel character is his insistence that freedom ultimately means obedience to the **general will**. Rousseau believed the general will to be the 'true' will of each citizen, in contrast to his or her 'private' or selfish will. By obeying the general will, citizens are therefore doing nothing more than obeying their own 'true' natures, the general will being what individuals would will if they were to act selflessly. In Rousseau's view, such a system of radical developmental democracy required not merely political equality but a relatively high level of

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78)

Geneva-born French moral and political philosopher, perhaps the principal intellectual influence upon the French Revolution. Rousseau was entirely self-taught. He moved to Paris in 1742, and became an intimate of leading members of the French Enlightenment, especially Diderot. His writings, ranging over education, the arts, science, literature and philosophy, reflect a deep belief in the

corruption of 'social man'. Rousseau's political teaching, summarized in *Émile* (1762) and developed in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1913), advocates a radical form of democracy that has influenced liberal, socialist, anarchist and, some would argue, fascist thought. His autobiography, *Confessions* (1770), examines his life with remarkable candour and dem



economic equality. Although not a supporter of common ownership, Rousseau nevertheless proposed that 'no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself' ([1762] 1913:96).

Rousseau's theories have helped to shape the modern idea of participatory democracy taken up by New Left thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s. This extols the virtues of a 'participatory society', a society in which each and every citizen is able to achieve self-development by participating in the decisions that shape his or her life. This goal can be achieved only through the promotion of openness, accountability (see p. 393) and decentralization within all the key institutions of society: within the family, the workplace and the local community just as much as within 'political' institutions such as parties, interest groups and legislative bodies. At the heart of this model is the notion of 'grass-roots democracy': that is, the belief that political power should be exercised at the lowest possible level. Nevertheless, Rousseau's own theories have been criticized for distinguishing between citizens' 'true' wills and their 'felt' or subjective wills. The danger of this is that, if the general will cannot be established by simply asking citizens what they want (because they may be blinded by selfishness), there is scope for the general will to be defined from above, perhaps by a dictator claiming to act in the 'true' interests of society. Rousseau is therefore sometimes seen as the architect of so-called totalitarian democracy (Talmon, 1952).

However, a more modest form of developmental democracy has also been advanced that is compatible with the liberal model of representative government. This view of developmental democracy is rooted in the writings of John Stuart Mill (see p. 46). For Mill, the central virtue of democracy was that it promotes the 'highest and harmonious' development of individual capacities. By participating in political life, citizens enhance their understanding, strengthen their sensibilities, and achieve a higher level of personal development. In short, democracy is essentially an educational experience. As a result, Mill proposed the broadening of popular participation, arguing that the franchise should be extended to all but those who are illiterate. In the process, he suggested (radically, for his time) that suffrage should also be extended to women. In addition, he advocated strong and independent local authorities in the belief that this would broaden the opportunities available for holding public office.

On the other hand, Mill, in common with all liberals, was also aware of the dangers of democracy. Indeed, Mill's views are out of step with mainstream liberal thought in that he rejected the idea of formal political equality. Following Plato, Mill did not

Concept

Parliamentary democracy

Parliamentary democracy is a form of democratic rule that operates through a popularly elected deliberative assembly, which establishes an indirect link between government and the governed. Democracy, in this sense, essentially means responsible and representative government. Parliamentary democracy thus balances popular participation against elite rule: government is accountable not directly to the public but to the public's elected representatives. The attraction of such a system is that representatives are, by virtue of their education and the opportunities that they have to deliberate and debate, supposedly better able than citizens themselves to define the citizens' best interests. In the classical form of parliamentary democracy, associated with J. S. Mill and Burke (see p. 47), parliamentarians are required to think for themselves on behalf of their constituents. Modern party politics, however, has fused the ideas of parliamentary democracy and mandate democracy (see p. 228).

believe that all political opinions are of equal value. Consequently, he proposed a system of plural voting: unskilled workers would have a single vote, skilled workers two votes, and graduates and members of the learned professions five or six votes. However, his principal reservation about democracy was derived from the more typical liberal fear of what Alexis de Tocqueville (see p. 218) famously described as 'the tyranny of the majority'. In other words, democracy always contains the threat that individual liberty and minority rights may be crushed in the name of the people. Mill's particular concern was that democracy would undermine debate, criticism and intellectual life in general by encouraging people to accept the will of the majority, thereby promoting uniformity and dull conformism. Quite simply, the majority is not always right; wisdom cannot be determined by the simple device of a show of hands. Mill's ideas therefore support the idea of **deliberative democracy** or parliamentary democracy.

People's democracy

The term 'people's democracy' is derived from the orthodox communist regimes that sprang up on the Soviet model in the aftermath of the Second World War. It is here used, however, to refer broadly to the various democratic models that the Marxist tradition has generated. Although they differ, these models offer a clear contrast to the more familiar liberal democratic ones. Marxists have tended to be dismissive of liberal or parliamentary democracy, seeing it as a form of 'bourgeois' or 'capitalist' democracy. Nevertheless, Marxists were drawn to the concept or ideal of democracy because of its clear egalitarian implications. The term was used in particular to designate the goal of social equality brought about through the common ownership of wealth ('social democracy' in its original sense), in contrast to 'political' democracy, which establishes only a facade of equality.

Marx believed that the overthrow of capitalism would be a trigger that would allow genuine democracy to flourish. In his view, a fully communist society would come into existence only after a transitional period characterized by 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'. In effect, a system of 'bourgeois' democracy would be replaced by a very different system of 'proletarian' democracy. Although Marx refused to describe in detail how this transitional society would be organized, its broad shape can be discerned from his admiration for the Paris Commune of 1871, which was a short-lived experiment in what approximated to direct democracy. Marx predicted, however, that, as class antagonisms faded and a fully communist society came into existence, the proletarian state would simply 'wither away'. Not only would this bring an end to the need for government, law and even politics, but it would also, effectively, make democracy redundant.

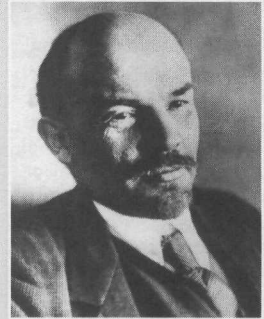
The form of democracy that was developed in twentieth-century communist states, however, owed more to the ideas of V. I. Lenin than it did to those of Marx. Although Lenin's 1917 slogan 'All power to the Soviets' (the workers' and soldiers' and sailors' councils) had kept alive the notion of commune democracy, in reality power in Soviet Russia quickly fell into the hands of the Bolshevik party (soon renamed the Communist Party). In Lenin's view, this party was nothing less than 'the vanguard of the working class'. Armed with Marxism, the party claimed that it was able to perceive the genuine interests of the proletariat and thus guide it to the realization of its revolutionary potential. This theory became the cornerstone of 'Leninist democracy' in the USSR, and it was accepted by all other orthodox

Deliberative democracy: A form of democracy that emphasizes the need for discourse and debate to help define the public interest.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924)

Russian Marxist theorist and active revolutionary. As leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin masterminded the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution, and became the first leader of the USSR. His contributions to Marxism were his theory of the revolutionary or vanguard party, outlined in *What is to be Done?* ([1902] 1968), his analysis of colonialism as an economic phenomenon, described in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* ([1916] 1970),

and his firm commitment to the 'insurrectionary road to socialism', developed in *State and Revolution* (1917). Lenin's reputation is inevitably tied up with the subsequent course of Soviet history; he is seen by some as the father of Stalinist oppression, but by others as a critic of bureaucracy and a defender of debate and argument.



communist regimes as one of the core features of Marxism-Leninism. However, the weakness of this model is that Lenin failed to build into it any mechanism for checking the power of the Communist Party (and particularly its leaders) and for ensuring that it remained sensitive and accountable to the proletarian class. To rephrase Aristotle, 'who will guard the Communist Party?'

Democracy in practice: rival views

Although there continues to be controversy about which is the most desirable form of democracy, much of contemporary debate revolves around how democracy works in practice and what 'democratization' (see p. 81) implies. This reflects the fact that there is broad, even worldwide, acceptance of a particular model of democracy, generally termed liberal democracy. Despite the existence of competing tendencies within this broad category, certain central features are clear:

- Liberal democracy is an indirect and representative form of democracy in that political office is gained through success in regular elections that are conducted on the basis of formal political equality.
- Liberal democracy is based on competition and electoral choice. These are achieved through political pluralism, tolerance of a wide range of contending beliefs, and the existence of conflicting social philosophies and rival political movements and parties.
- In liberal democracy, there is a clear distinction between the state and civil society. This distinction is maintained through the existence of autonomous groups and interests, and the market or capitalist organization of economic life.

Nevertheless, there is a considerable amount of disagreement about the meaning and significance of liberal democracy. Does it, for instance, ensure a genuine and healthy dispersal of political power? Do democratic processes genuinely promote long-term benefits, or are they self-defeating? Can political equality coexist with economic inequality? In short, this form of democracy is interpreted in different ways by different theorists. The most important of these interpretations are advanced by:

- pluralism
- elitism

Concept

Pluralism

The term pluralism is used in two senses, one broad the other narrow. In its broader sense, pluralism is a belief in, or a commitment to, diversity or multiplicity (the existence of many things). As a descriptive term, pluralism may be used to denote the existence of party competition (political pluralism), a multiplicity of ethical values (moral pluralism), or a variety of cultural norms (cultural pluralism). As a normative term, it suggests that diversity is healthy and desirable, usually because it safeguards individual liberty and promotes debate, argument and understanding. More narrowly, pluralism is a theory of the distribution of political power. It holds that power is widely and evenly dispersed in society rather than concentrated in the hands of an elite or a ruling class. In this form, pluralism is usually seen as a theory of 'group politics' in which individuals are represented largely through their membership of organized groups, and all such groups have access to the policy process.

- corporatism
- the New Right
- Marxism.

Pluralist view

Pluralist ideas can be traced back to early liberal political philosophy, and notably to the ideas of Locke and Montesquieu (see p. 312). Their first systematic development, however, is found in the contributions of James Madison (see p. 302) to *The Federalist Papers* (Hamilton, Jay and Madison, [1787-89] 1961). In considering the transformation of America from a loose confederation of states into the federal USA, Madison's particular fear was the 'problem of factions'. In common with most liberals, Madison argued that unchecked democratic rule might simply lead to majoritarianism, to the crushing of individual rights and to the expropriation of property in the name of the people. What made Madison's work notable, however, was his stress upon the multiplicity of interests and groups in society, and his insistence that, unless each such group possessed a political voice, stability and order would be impossible. He therefore proposed a system of divided government based on the separation of powers, **bicameralism** and federalism (see p. 161), that offered a variety of access points to competing groups and interests. The resulting system of rule by multiple minorities is often referred to as 'Madisonian democracy'. Insofar as it recognizes both the existence of diversity or multiplicity in society, and the fact that such multiplicity is desirable, Madison's model is the first developed statement of pluralist principles.

The most influential modern exponent of pluralist theory is Robert Dahl (see p. 274). As described in *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961), Dahl carried out an empirical study of the distribution of power in New Haven, Connecticut, USA. He concluded that, although the politically privileged and economically powerful exerted greater power than ordinary citizens, no ruling or permanent elite was able to dominate the political process. His conclusion was that 'New Haven is an example of a democratic system, warts and all' (p. 311). Dahl recognized that modern democratic systems differ markedly from the classical democracies of Ancient Greece. With Charles Lindblom, he coined the term 'polyarchy' (see p. 33) to mean rule by the many, as distinct from rule by all citizens. The key feature of such a system of pluralist democracy is that competition between parties at election time, and the ability of interest or pressure groups to articulate their views freely, establishes a reliable link between the government and the governed, and creates a channel of communication between the two. While this may fall a long way short of the ideal of popular self-government, its supporters nevertheless argue that it ensures a sufficient level of accountability and popular responsiveness for it to be regarded as democratic.

However, the relationship between pluralism and democracy may not be a secure one. For instance, one of the purposes of the Madisonian system was, arguably, to constrain democracy in the hope of safeguarding property. In other words, the system of rule by multiple minorities may simply have been a device to prevent the majority (the propertyless masses) from exercising political power. A further problem is the danger of what has been called 'pluralist stagnation'. This occurs as organized groups and economic interests become so powerful that they create a log jam, resulting in the problem of government 'overload'. In such circumstances, a pluralist system may simply become ungovernable. Finally, there is the problem identified by

Bicameralism: The fragmentation of legislative power, established through the existence of two (co-equal) chambers in the assembly; a device of limited government (see p. 321).

Dahl in later works such as *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (1985), notably that the unequal ownership of economic resources tends to concentrate political power in the hands of the few, and deprive it from the many. This line of argument runs parallel to the conventional Marxist critique of pluralist democracy, and has given rise to neopluralism (see p. 90).

Elitist view

Elitism developed as a critique of egalitarian ideas such as democracy and socialism. It draws attention to the fact of elite rule, either as an inevitable and desirable feature of social existence, or as a remediable and regrettable one. Classical elitists, such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1857-1941) and Robert Michels (1876-1936), tended to take the former position. For them, democracy was no more than a foolish delusion, because political power is always exercised by a privileged minority: an elite. For example, in *The Ruling Class* ([1896] 1939), Mosca proclaimed that, in all societies, 'two classes of people appear - a class that rules and a class that is ruled'. In his view, the resources or attributes that are necessary for rule are always unequally distributed, and, further, a cohesive minority will always be able to manipulate and control the masses, even in a parliamentary democracy.

Pareto suggested that the qualities needed to rule are those of one of two psychological types: 'foxes' (who rule by cunning and are able to manipulate the consent of the masses), and 'lions' (whose domination is typically achieved through coercion and violence). Michels, however, developed an alternative line of argument based on the tendency within all organizations, however democratic they might appear, for power to be concentrated in the hands of a small group of dominant figures who can organize and make decisions, rather than being in the hands of an apathetic rank and file. He termed this 'the iron law of oligarchy' (see p. 256). This notion of bureaucratic power was later developed by James Burnham, who, in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), argued that a 'managerial class' dominated all industrial societies, both capitalist and communist, by virtue of its technical and scientific knowledge and its administrative skills.

Whereas classical elitists strove to prove that democracy was always a myth, modern elitist theorists have tended to highlight how far particular political systems fall short of the democratic ideal. An example of this can be found in C. Wright Mills' influential account of the power structure in the USA. In contrast to the pluralist notion of a wide and broadly democratic dispersal of power, Mills, in *The Power Elite* (1956), offered a portrait of a USA dominated by a nexus of leading groups. In his view, this 'power elite' comprised a triumvirate of big business (particularly defence-related industries), the US military, and political cliques surrounding the President. Drawing on a combination of economic power, bureaucratic control, and access to the highest levels of the executive branch of government, the power elite is able to shape key 'history-making' decisions, especially in the fields of defence and foreign policy, as well as strategic economic policy. The power-elite model suggests that liberal democracy in the USA is largely a sham. Electoral pressures tend to be absorbed by the 'middle levels of power' (Congress, state governments and so on), and groups such as organized labour, small businesses and consumer lobbyists are able to exert influence only at the margins of the policy process. Elitists have, moreover, argued that empirical studies have supported pluralist conclusions only because Dahl and others have ignored the importance of non-decision-making as a manifestation of power (see p. 11).

Concept

Pluralist democracy

The term pluralist democracy is sometimes used interchangeably with liberal democracy to indicate a democratic system based on electoral competition between a number of political parties. More specifically, it refers to a form of democracy that operates through the capacity of organized groups and interests to articulate popular demands and ensure government responsiveness. As such, it can be seen as an alternative to parliamentary democracy and to any form of majoritarianism. The conditions for a healthy pluralist democracy include the following:

- There is a wide dispersal of political power amongst competing groups, and, specifically, elite groups are absent.
- There is a high degree of internal responsiveness, with group leaders being accountable to members.
- There is a neutral governmental machine that is sufficiently fragmented to offer groups a number of points of access.

Concept

Elite, elitism

The term elite originally meant, and can still mean, the highest, the best, or the excellent. Used in a neutral or empirical sense, however, it refers to a minority in whose hands power, wealth or privilege is concentrated, justifiably or otherwise. Elitism is a belief in, or practice of, rule by an elite or minority.

Normative elitism suggests that elite rule is desirable: political power should be vested in the hands of a wise or enlightened minority. *Classical* elitism (developed by Mosca, Pareto and Michels) claimed to be empirical (although normative beliefs often intruded), and it saw elite rule as being inevitable, an unchangeable fact of social existence.

Modern elitism has also developed an empirical analysis, but it is more critical and discriminating about the causes of elite rule. Modern elitists, such as C. Wright Mills (1916–62), have often been concerned to highlight elite rule in the hope of both explaining it and challenging it.

Certain elite theorists have nevertheless argued that a measure of democratic accountability is consistent with elite rule. Whereas the power-elite model portrays the elite as a cohesive body, bound together by common or overlapping interests, competitive elitism (sometimes called democratic elitism) highlights the significance of elite rivalry (see Figure 4.1). In other words, the elite, consisting of the leading figures from a number of competing groups and interests, is fractured. This view is often associated with Joseph Schumpeter's (see p. 229) 'realistic' model of democracy outlined in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942:269):

The democratic method is 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.

The electorate can decide which elite rules, but cannot change the fact that power is always exercised by an elite. This model of competitive elitism was developed by Anthony Downs (1957) into the 'economic theory of democracy'. In effect, electoral competition creates a political market in which politicians act as entrepreneurs bent upon achieving government power, and individual voters behave like consumers, voting for the party with the policies that most closely reflect their own preferences. Downs argued that a system of open and competitive elections guarantees democratic rule because it places government in the hands of the party whose philosophy, values and policies correspond most closely to the preferences of the largest group of voters. As Schumpeter put it, 'democracy is the rule of the politician'.

As a model of democratic politics, competitive elitism at least has the virtue that it corresponds closely to the workings of the liberal-democratic political system. Indeed, it emerged more as an attempt to *describe* how the democratic process works than through a desire to *prescribe* certain values and principles - political equality, popular participation, freedom or whatever. Democracy, then, is seen simply as a political method: as a means of making political decisions by reference to a competitive struggle for the popular vote. To the extent that the model is accurate, its virtue is that it allows considerable scope for political leadership by placing decision-making in the hands of the best-informed, most-skilled, and most politically committed members of society. On the other hand, although competition for power undoubtedly creates a measure of accountability, competitive elitism must at best be considered a weak form of democracy. Not only can one elite only be removed by replacing it with another, but the role allotted to the general public (that of deciding every few years which elite will rule on its behalf) is likely to engender apathy, lack of interest, and even alienation.

Corporatist view

The origins of corporatism (see p. 275) date back to the attempt in Fascist Italy to construct a so-called 'corporate state' by integrating both managers and workers into the processes of government. Corporatist theorists, however, have drawn attention to parallel developments in the world's major industrialized states. In the form of **neocorporatism**, or liberal corporatism, this gave rise to the spectre of 'tripartite government', in which government is conducted through organizations that allow state officials, employers' groups and unions to deal directly with one another. To a large extent, this tendency to integrate economic interests into government (which was common in the post-1945 period, and particularly prominent in, for example,

Neocorporatism: A tendency found in western polyarchies for organized interests to be granted privileged and institutionalized access to policy formulation.