

Rosanvallon, P. (2006) Democracy Past and Future. Samuel Moyn, ed. New York: Columbia University Press.

Introduction—Antitotalitarianism and After (Moyn)

[Moyn is very preachy and dismissive of all those who have missed the boat on PR while reading the other trash. Crushes the alternatives into dust and then presents you with the only remaining choice as the best one. The kind of academic who makes you not want to be an academic.]

everyone agrees democracy is important 1
mad rush on the Left to avoid totalitarianism 1
[were the "nouveaux philosophes" a non-marxist attempt at this?]
some turn to liberalism 2
some turn to 'radical democracy' 2
some melange: marxism, postmodernism, third-worldism 3
democracy is on everyone's lips 3
bash Hardt & Negri, who pray for the multitude, lack institutional program, just vilify Empire, neo-marxist populism..all defective: a catastrophe for the left 4
PR is the way to go because he is historical 5
criticizes Habermas and Rawls as too normative 5
he is definitely coming out of the antitotalitarian school 6
focuses on the future of democracy 6
member of 1968 6
not about party control of the state, but everyday life 6
rooted in the CFDT trade union: noncommunist, reformist, autogestionist 6
PR a principle theorist of autogestion 7
anti-statist, emphasized civil society (against PCF Stalinism) 7
[that *does* bear out, I think, in the end, in his work]
Lefort is a central thinker of the antitotalitarian movement, and is PR's main teacher and influence 8
always know that unity is false 8
central site of power (now 'the people') is empty 9
democratic emancipation, but with the awareness that democracy can never be finished, is never identical to itself 9
pluralism 10
Castoriadis lumped into the group with Lefort 10
PR examines the history of the idea of a sovereign people 10
PR is not a liberal, in which he saw totalitarianism as well 11
focus on the history of democracy, and this volume focuses on that focus 11
methodology: history of the political (which, following Lefort, is the founding of society and the creation of its basic coherence) 12
non-materialist, more philosophical, historical 14
there are no immutable political questions, but they also do exhibit some long-term patterns (on the temporal scale of, say, the modern era) 14
so he wants to identify the pathologies of the modern ideas of politics 14
voluntarism: dream of a unified people deciding for itself 15
rationalism: impersonal science of politics by experts, without the need for a popular will 16
economic liberalism: fantasy of society emancipated in the self-regulated market, with no need for politics 19
Marx was guilty of this in a way [this critique is useless] 20
political liberalism: [PR has a critique] 21
"democratic association" is the way to go; it incarnates the political and can help us out of modern political thought 22
the idea of emancipation sows the seeds of totalitarianism 22
democracy is plural, historical 23
can a positive politics emerge from this relentless antitotalitarian critique of utopia? 23
antitotalitarianism in negative, excises terror and unity from politics 25
should we turn toward democracy and away from totalitarianism? 25
pluralize sovereignty? 25
[PR will do this in the volume]
this collection is Lefortian: explore the potential of democracy without

insisting on a definite program 26

democracy is always in development, always being deepened, and its aporias can never be resolved 26

PR: explore the open field of democracy: no final answer, no closure 27

PART I: THE STUDY OF POLITICS IN HISTORY

Chapter 1: Inaugural Lecture, College De France (2002)

[the talk he gave upon assuming the best-job-ever]

Thought and activism are part of the same project. To go forward, we must seriously consider the past, and specifically a history of the political. The political is the process in which a human collectivity becomes a community (i.e. elaborates what they have in common). It is the institution of a (more or less coherent) society. Democracy is particularly open or indeterminate way to constitute the political. Democracy has a history, and it will reveal some consistencies. But democracy will always exhibit tensions, and they will never be resolved. Those tensions, and the strategies a society uses to deal with them, are the focus of his historical investigation. Themes around which such tensions develop in democracy are: popular sovereignty, representative government, general will, suffrage, equality, freedom, emancipation.

Totalitarianism--the dream of a power that can fully absorb society--must be avoided. PR is not about a lament for a purported decline of popular will, nor the (bourgeois) dream of the apolitical administration of things. Rather he is interested in the continuing need to build a life in common, to constitute the shared community, but without devolving into thinking we want or have achieved "the One".

Chapter 2: Toward a Philosophical History of the Political 2002

[methodological reflections]

Both Marxism and liberalism aim at a fully realized ideal, but we want to avoid such totalitarianism. Lefort defines the political is a set of procedures that institutes the social, a form of rule outside the ordinary [i.e. transcendent? or artificial?], outside the natural. The political is the constitution of an order accepted by all about the norms of participation and distribution. About how the community is represented politically. PR's method is to understand how actual societies work out these tensions historically. Don't just read the great thinkers to get ideas that transcend history (pace Leo Strauss), but read them as attempts to work out a political problem in their own historical context.

What democracy is, in fact, is a history of the search for solutions to political problems. Universal suffrage, for example, is an experiment by some actual societies trying to solve particular problems, not a genetic feature of democracy. And we should try to see what resonances/lessons we can pick up from those solutions tried before us. This historical inquiry is part of political practice, not outside it, because it helps define the field of political ideas, it sets out what we are able to think politically. The method thus shares much with Foucault, but PR thinks F was too simple in his understanding of power as domination/resistance. Power is also about experimentation by actors who are trying to solve particular problems, and we need to understand those actors on their own terms (while also looking for resonances).

PART II: THE VOLUNTARIST DRIVE TO UNITY

Chapter 3: Revolutionary Democracy (2000)

The sovereign people is one such concept/problem/solution in democracy, perhaps *the* concept. The people is elusive, must be represented, incarnated metaphorically. Festivals, statues, words. Is it a totality, unified, variegated? How do the political abstraction and the sociological reality relate? The concept has included more and less people throughout history. The nation, the rabble--possibility and danger. In the French revolution, the unity of the people was paramount (so it could stand against the ancien regime). Sublime differences, sacrifice to the common good. JJR. In France this

unification was done through representation, which institutes the people. Distinction of factions/estates/parts. Always the gap between 'the people' as political agent and the actual society of people. Only in the event (insurrection) does this gap seem to be overcome [Badiou and Ranciere]. The event allows the people to become pure action, unmediated will, fugitive moment. de Sade: insurrection as permanent condition so that the people and their representation can coincide, eliminate the gap, and this might be the realization of popular sovereignty. Not an aggregation of individuals, not an assembly of sections. But the fused people that can speak in its one voice. In the French revolution, this was a totalitarian concept, enforced with brutality. For Rosanvallon, it seems, there is something in this idea of the people as active uprising, acting in a mass. But how to keep the people alive and acting after the event is over--for PR this "is the whole question of democratic politics."

Chapter 4: The Republic of Universal Suffrage (1993)

The French model, with its unified people, is tied to universal suffrage. Social inclusion. Both from below and from above. A republican ideal that was a critique of monarchy. A means of redistribution and preventing corruption. 1848 was the first declaration, all agreed, unity (fraternite) achieved, social division overcome, pluralism bad. [Clearly this tradition helps explain the Lefortian (and French theorists more broadly) obsession with pluralism above all other values.] This inclusion suppresses revolution--without the vote, the working classes would "have to enter the city as a life force." Marx was aware of this pacifying function and opposed it. The concern in France was how to ward off monarchy, and so republican unity was prized. Almost religiously. The One.

PART III: THE ALLURE OF RATIONALISM

Chapter 5: Francois Guizot and the Sovereignty of Reason (1985)

An alternative to will for founding the political community: reason. It is less arbitrary/unpredictable. Went well with capitalism and scientific management. English style liberalism is not known in France. Rule of law, liberalism and democracy as a pair, individualism. In England, economic and political liberalism are a pair. Not so in France. Guizot: we must found the political on reason. Not interest, not will, not experience. Don't oscillate between tyranny and anarchy. Find a stable regime that will protect rights and popular sovereignty without contract, without organicism. Sovereign and transcendent reason. The law should be what reason commands. Here universal suffrage is reduced in importance. This is one way the bourgeoisie was able to temper the universal suffrage idea. Let experts guide us with reason.

Chapter 6: Political Rationalism and Democracy in France (1994)

French love both popular will and reason. The idea that the state needed to abide by the rule of law, or that it needs to be accountable to the people, are not assumed in France: the power can be good/rational without these checks [all very Hegel]. In England the structures of representation they created were their way of combatting the ancien regime. In France, it was rationalization/modernization [of the bureaucracy?]. Freedom follows from a rational (rather than irrational) state. No English liberalism, parliamentarianism, tolerance. Don't let the people's will govern; let reason rule. Good schooling becomes important so everyone will know reason [it is very Platonic]. No checks and balances. Reason will check arbitrary power. And yet also, at the same time, France valorizes general will and suffrage. The unified people against the excluded ancien regime. The people/nation becomes sovereign instead of the king; hence the empty space of power, a figment of imagination is placed in the seat of power [not clear how this is different from H's artificial person ruling--both are empty/non-existent]. Reconciling these two tendencies (rationalism and popular will) becomes *the* political question in the French polity. To vote is to be a member of the community. Meritocracy: the rational ones know best, should staff the bureaucracy/technocracy. Democracy in France:

educate rational men and citizens; a social form more than political model; total inclusion into the One; no more division. Contradiction between democratic spontaneity of the masses and the reason of the bureaucrats.

PART IV: CIVIL SOCIETY

Chapter 7: The Market, Liberalism, and Anti-Liberalism (1999)

The market (decentralized organization) is the primary alternative to democracy today. Aspires to a self-regulated (through the market) civil society and is therefore apolitical (in the sense that it does not imagine a modern-political-theory-contract-State community). It argues for a withering away of politics [which PR will oppose]. No need for authority/violence/force/subordination for A. Smith. Also commerce is the only relation it imagines; no need for logos. The socialists of the 19th century were the same, for PR: self-regulating civil society with no need for a political society [he would say the same about most anarchists, and he will of course not want the withering of the political (though perhaps the State?)]. Liberalism's (Hume, Smith, Locke) love of depersonalized, non-sovereign, immanent organization of a society of autonomous individuals is the precursor to the neoliberalism of today. The capitalist market is an obvious pair for this idea. Nothing left today of the Rousseauian alternative, which is to say totalization of the political sphere at the expense of civil society. PR is seeking another way to institute the political: one that is not pure civil-society-self-regulation, not total-political State-command. He wants to imagine political society as not 1) the State, or 2) civil society. Don't dissolve the political field, but free it to work with the fact of irreducible conflict and division. Democracy is not a unified people, not a general will, not a self-regulating civil society. It is a combat that will always be marked by difference/conflict. [Clear overlap with Ab here in that he defends the political against the idea of both a self-regulating civil society and State authority.]

Chapter 8: Marx and Civil Society (1978)

[It seems clear that it is this kind of argument that Ab is wanting to counter: Marx as apolitical thinker.]

Marx is a liberal in many ways: especially in his political thought, in which he desires the extinction of politics. Favors a self-sufficient civil society against the State, absorbing the State. Democracy for him is a social form rather than a political government. For Marx, real democracy is realized through the realization of market society [PR has got it all wrong here, almost like he is a young scholar trying to get noticed with a controversial argument]. Marx fights Hegel by returning to Smith, the withering of politics, and PR says that in Marx the withering of the State is the same thing as the extinction of the political. Marx differs from Smith, PR admits, in that he does not take capitalist civil society as true civil society. True civil society, for M, is when man organizes his powers as social powers, which for PR means M wants the withering away of the political sphere. M wants to deepen modern individualism. M does denounce disconnected-atom individualism, and homo economicus. But he does so only because it conceives of only a part of the individual (the economic element) not the whole individual, which M wants to restore ("integral individualism"). PR seems to understand that M thinks our true nature is as a social animal, but still calls M an individualist. And PR thinks M can only understand social relations as pure commerce (rather than a political/Aristotelian idea of such relations). M's idea of alienation is any separation of the individual from himself (man and citizen, man and producer, etc.). M wants there to be no more separate spheres of activity. The economy as a separate sphere from the polity. Communism means the extinction of both as a separate sphere. M assumes kism's progress is inevitable, so we can only push it farther if we are to overcome it. [Here is the rub: M sees harmony as the default state of man, and disharmony as existing only because capitalism forces it to...he sees the separations of alienation as unnatural, to be overcome in communism...but a Lefortian hates these ideas.] M's communism is pure commerce,

PR says, the overcoming of all division, the end of the political, a society without mediation--nothing other than, for PR, the realization of liberal utopia.

PART V: THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

Chapter 9: From the Past to the Future of Democracy (2000)

We must continue to pursue democracy and the political. Not the Rousseauian valorization of the popular will; not liberalism's limitations on the political. Popular sovereignty is not social unanimity, not the One, the unified body, which-all has collapsed now anyway. But we can still work for popular sovereignty, we just have to imagine sovereignty desacralized. Ordinary democracy--the attempt to institute individuals into a community with a robust political life. A complex sovereignty, pluralized, along with a generalized emancipation. Both institutional and non-institutional sovereignty. Many modes of popular influence over decisions. Still representative government, a constitution, accountability. Democracy as fully liberalized (?). Sovereignty imagined to be always incomplete and renewed. 'The people' is also plural, never identical to itself. Yet democracy should also have the ability to be durable, rather than only contested and in upheaval. Both immediate time frames and longer-term ones (e.g. constitution). More civic participation. More fields subjected to a political life (e.g. the economy). Neither illiberal democracy nor undemocratic liberalism. Not the individual absorbed into the collective, nor the free atom. Autogestion linked individual emancipation and social emancipation. Democracy does not put the people in power, it institutes the people. We must do this institution positively and legibly. Not calling for a powerful State that will overcome difference. Also some redistribution.

[Really vague, milquetoasty, sort of strong-liberal-democracy with heavy pluralism. PR is intellectually patient and thoughtful, but his political courage is really inadequate.]

Chapter 10: The Transformation of Democracy and the Future of Europe (2002)

Citizens feel powerless, democracy in crisis. Welfare state crisis weakens the bonds of social institution. Increasing number of ways the people can bring themselves to bear on decision-making. Also, there are more political agents, more interests, and more ways to represent them. Permanent tension in: emancipation as individual autonomy, or as collective power. The political is no longer based on the unified will; the self-organizing capacity of civil society seems to be growing. Rather than a metaphysical idea of sovereignty, we need an instrumental conception of sovereignty. PR is against civil society substituting for political society, especially a market-run civil society. A demos must be constituted for a democracy to be. Democracy should make limited experiments with the universal. Charters (regulatory principles), not constitutions (organize a demos, set up institutions). Feels like a soft Euro Keynesianism hoping only for a stronger, enlarged publicity.

Postscript: Democracy in an Era of Distrust (2006)

[This piece is original to the book.]

There is a lack of trust in political leaders, but not necessarily apathy. Different forms of engagement and voice and participation are good, and we should be attentive to the emergence of these. The gap between legitimacy and trust is the central problem in democracy. Distrust is constitutive of democracy. What we can do is institutionalize distrust.

Watchdogging/oversight/muckraking. Not exit or voice or representation or negotiation, but oversight. Multiply the unaccountable institutions of oversight--negative democracy [sounds great!!!!]. Other forms of intervention like passive majorities. Indirect democracy--impartial judicial structures (independent authorities). He thinks what he is doing is "enlarging the political function." Lots of division of powers, an 'economy of distrust'. The

power of the people applied indirectly. It seems PR wants: the institutionalization and rationalization of the forms of indirect democracy, as well as their politicization. Democratic projects--the continuous action of society on itself; permanent diatetic care. Democracy conceived of as social activity. Again, some redistribution/socialism.

[I can't imagine being less excited by a vision of democracy than I am by PR's vision of democracy. I am struggling to find any value here. Maybe just a bit in the idea that we should study the strategies each society uses to deal with the problems of democracy they face.]