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Input Democracy*

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I. Power and the Politics of the Bottom Line

Democrats rightly worry about 'the politics of the bottom line': who gets what, when, how.¹ They press for reforms to political procedures and practice with those questions of 'power over the bottom line' clearly in view.

Theorists among us want to distinguish sharply issues of procedure from issues of substance.² Democratic activists, however, perceive the two as being inextricably intertwined. For them, the whole point of expanding the franchise was to give the lower classes some real power over the outcome, not merely to satisfy the niceties of some empty formalism. Likewise, the point of 'one person one vote' electoral reform (eliminating 'rotten boroughs' and their contemporary equivalents) was deeply pragmatic as well as importantly symbolic. So too were requirements of regular, free and fair elections, of campaign spending limits, of free speech and association, and so on. All those are obvious requirements of procedural rectitude.³ But they were all also supposed to carry some very practical political consequences. All were supposed to serve, in their various ways, to equalize the power of citizens over ultimate political outcomes.

This hard-headed focus on the bottom line is built into the notion of power itself and epitomized in the sorts of 'power studies' that once virtually defined political science as a discipline. Analytically, the concept of 'power'

¹Lasswell 1950.

²So too, during the Cold War, did ideologues of East and West (Naess et al. 1956).

³They all figure in, e.g., Beitz's (1989) 'theory of political fairness'.

inevitably points to the bottom line: 'power represents resources and ability to influence results'; power is the 'production of intended effects'.⁴ So too in empirical power studies, from Charles Beard's analysis of the American founding through Floyd Hunter's study of Atlanta and Robert Dahl's of New Haven, a central focus was always on the bottom line — on the extent to which formally democratic procedures are circumvented in their actual functioning by concentrations of power and influence.⁵ Similarly, at a more pragmatic level yet again, electoral reform lobbies around the world campaign for their favourite voting rule on the grounds that it more nearly equalizes the 'power' of each voter.⁶

Now, equalizing power over the bottom line is an important political project. Nothing I say here is intended to denigrate it. But there is, I think, another model of democracy that is also deserving of a respectful airing, particularly in a Nordic context. This alternative model focuses on inputs rather than outputs. It aims to give everyone (or, alternatively, every distinct affected interest) a 'voice' — that, rather than necessarily an equal (understood as 'equally effective') 'say' over the ultimate outcome.

I shall call this 'input democracy', in contrast with 'output democracy'.⁷ Those terms mark a distinction between a concern with different stages —

⁴Power & Democracy Project 2000, p 14. Russell 1938. Emphasis added in both cases.

⁵Beard 1913. Hunter 1953. Dahl 1961. Almost invariably they are, and the democratic reformer's task is then to come up with some prescription for equalizing real power over the final results — through giving different people power over different domains (Dahl 1961; Walzer 1983) or through consciousness-raising (Lukes 1974; Gaventa 1980) or whatever.

⁶As measured through the Banzhaf index or the Shapley-Shubik index or some other. See, e.g.: Dummett 1985; 1997; Morriss 1987, pt. IV; Barry 1989, esp. ch. 9; Taagepera and Shugart 1989.

⁷This contrast loosely overlaps Riker's (1983) between input-oriented 'populism' and the output-accountability of 'liberalism', and Scharpf's (1999, ch. 1) following him between 'input-' and 'output-oriented legitimation'. But the liberal accountability there in view is

early and late — of the political process. The point of input democracy, as I see it, is mainly to wean us away from our preoccupation with the bottom line. Equal power over the bottom line is not all there is to democracy. What goes on above the bottom line matters, too: and only partly in terms of what impact it might actually have on the bottom line.

Of course input and output democracy are causally connected, as democratic activists have long appreciated. Democratic activists campaigning for extensions of the franchise or one-person-one-vote are, in the first instance, urging that everyone should have equal inputs into the process. But as I have said, they do so in the clear (and far from groundless) hope that people will thereby acquire more nearly equal power over political outcomes as well.

While the two models I shall be distinguishing are thus empirically intertwined, they are analytically distinct. And the analytics can sometimes be of practical consequence as well. Having sketched the central concerns of the two models generically, I shall then present Schumpeter's model as the paradigmatically output-oriented account. I then go on to sketch what might be regarded as a paradigmatically input-oriented contrast with it. The latter,

based on 'assessments of results' (what political scientists would ordinarily call the 'outcomes' that follow from the political system's 'outputs'); and that pushes what I take to be the paradigmatically output-democratic concern ('equal power over the bottom line') into the 'populist/input-oriented' category (cf. Scharpf 1999, pp. 13-21). Dworkin's (2000, p. 186) notion of 'equal distribution of political power' similarly straddles what I want to regard as input and output considerations, touching as it does upon issues of both who gets a vote and how votes get aggregated. Although oriented toward very different problems, my own earlier discussion of 'input' and 'output filters' is broadly consistent with my present usage: output filters (such as entrenched rights) operate at the tail end of the political process, barring certain sorts of enactments from emerging as laws; input filters (such as prohibitions against hate speech, on the floor of the legislature or elsewhere) block certain inputs from ever entering into the political process from the start (Goodin 1986, pp. 77-81).

although an analytic construct, is loosely modelled on and represented by the sort of 'consultative democracy' characteristic of the Nordic countries and, indeed, of 'corporatist' and 'consociational' democracies worldwide.

II. Against a Preoccupation with Outputs

Let us take a few steps back in order to get the problematic nature of output-oriented accounts of democracy into sharper focus.

A. The Larger Problem with Majority Tyranny

One of the classic complaints against majority voting, recall, is the risk of 'majority tyranny'. To prevent majorities from oppressing 'persistent minorities', we have to find a way of somehow circumscribing the authority of majorities.⁸ Democrats are more or less apologetic about the need for such devices.⁹ But however brave a face democratic theorists may put on the situation, these devices nonetheless represent democratic constraints on the

⁸By a bill of rights specifying what not even majorities can do; or by institutional devices (bicameralism, federalism, single transferable votes or separate electoral registers) which, in effect, give minorities a veto.

⁹Some of the relatively unapologetic ones sometimes come up with relatively compelling cases. Consider, for example, the claim that devices circumscribing the operation of democracy are implicit in the argument for democracy at all: on that account, 'respect for persons' requires us both to count everyone's vote equally and also not to act disrespectfully or tyrannically toward people, no matter how the vote has gone.

operation of democracy. Their necessity inevitably constitutes a clear limit to the application of principles of majoritarian democracy.¹⁰

All that is exceedingly familiar. What I now want to suggest is that this embarrassing risk of majority tyranny is not just an incidental artefact of one particularly unfortunate (viz., majoritarian) specification of the democratic decision rule. Instead, I argue, it derives from an output-oriented approach to democratic theory more broadly.

What all output-oriented approaches share is an emphasis upon finding some social decision rule — some way of aggregating votes — which is privileged from a democratic point of view.¹¹ If democratic theorists succeed in that task, then there is no arguing with the deliverances of that rule. It points to the right thing to do: end of story.

That represents what can be called 'the arrogance of aggregation'. And that claim to ultimate decisiveness constitutes, I submit, the real culprit. 'Majority tyranny' is just one specific instance, one particular way of filling out the formula. But the tyrannical nature of decision rules arises from their claim to 'ultimate decisiveness', whether the decision rule in question is majoritarian or super-majoritarian or multi-tiered. The problem is that once the aggregation has been done, on whatever basis, that is the end of the

¹⁰Rae (1967) is admirably explicit on this point: he, and Taylor (1967) building on him, show that simple majority rule uniquely maximizes the probability of getting the outcome you want less the probability of getting the outcome you do not want; but that proof explicitly presupposes that voters vote independently of one another rather than in blocs or factions.

¹¹Perhaps uniquely so. But even if not, the balance of this paragraph is still largely correct. That is to say, there are only very limited grounds for arguing with the deliverances of the aggregation rule, in terms of some other rule being equally or more eligible: there are no grounds for mounting an argument against the deliverances of aggregation rules,

matter.¹² Further considerations — of minority rights or anything else — can no longer be brought into play.¹³ All has been said and done. That assertion of 'ultimate decisiveness' is the true 'arrogance of aggregation', and the problems it causes are quite independent of whatever way in which the aggregation is accomplished.

B. Against the Arrogance of Democratic Aggregation

A central claim of input democrats is that there must be more to a legitimate political process than can be captured in any mechanical aggregation process. What we should be doing in the political process is evaluating the competing claims of various parties on their merits. That must be a genuinely reflective process: internally contemplative in the first instance, interpersonally discursive in the second.¹⁴

No purely mechanical process can be reflective in the ways that are required to track (and in that way responsively and responsibly adjudicate)

¹²Majorities can be compelling in input-terms as well, of course — but inputs, however numerous and one-sided, cannot in and of themselves be tyrannical, in this sense of closing off further deliberations.

¹³There are of course ways of remedying those problems, even within broadly aggregative models. We might, for example, use notions of rights as 'output filters' (Goodin 1986) to be deployed after the aggregation has taken place but before the social decision has been settled. But then the aggregation itself would lose its 'ultimate decisiveness', which I take to be a defining characteristic of the sort of 'output democracy' here under discussion.

¹⁴In elaborating his claim that the American political system was supposed to be 'one of deliberation rather than aggregation', Sunstein (1993, pp. 242-3) goes on to recall that, 'The framers insisted that existing views might be a product of partial perspectives, of limited experience, or of incomplete information. People engaged in democratic discussion should "meet others from the different parts of the Union, and consult". People should be "open to the force of argument"'. This is especially clear in debates in the first Congress refusing to give citizens as part of the Bill of Rights a 'right to instruct' their representative. See similarly Cohen 1989; 1998.

the claims and counter-claims that lie at the core of the political process. A person's vote summarizes his or her opinion only crudely and with much loss of nuance. Aggregations of many people's votes lose more information, yet again.

Note, though, how easily mechanical analogies trip from the tongue when talking of decision rules and voting procedures. We talk of 'weighing' interests and arguments; of 'balancing' them; of 'aggregating' them, in ways that conjure up images of cranking the handle of an old-fashioned adding machine.

Far from being just loose language, this is actually the standard way of thinking about the democratic process across a wide range of democratic theory. In his justly famous paper on 'A paradox in the theory of democracy', for example, Richard Wollheim explicitly invites us to:

envisage Democracy in terms of a certain machine.... Into it are fed, at fixed intervals, the choices of the individual citizens. The machine then aggregates them according to the pre-established rule or method, and so comes up with what may be called a 'choice' of its own. Democratic rule is said to be achieved if ... the most recent choice of the machine is acted upon.¹⁵

Self-styled 'public choice' theorists talk in equally mechanistic terms: voting, for them, produces a 'summation of preferences'¹⁶; more technically, 'a collective choice rule' is represented as a 'function' which serves to transform individual preference orderings into a unique social preference relation.¹⁷

¹⁵Wollheim 1962, p. 76; quoted approvingly in Waldron 1995, p. 337.

¹⁶Riker 1961.

¹⁷A collective choice rule is a functional relation f such that for any set n of individual orderings R_1, \dots, R_n (one ordering for each individual), one and only one social preference relation R is determined, $R = f(R_1, \dots, R_n)$ (Sen 1970, pp. 35-6).

What is crucial about all these mechanistic democratic aggregation procedures, from the present perspective, is that they are authoritative and decisive. They settle things. Taking preferences (or votes or whatever) as inputs, they crank out 'the right answer'. As long as the procedures for aggregating accord equal weight (or power or whatever) to each person's inputs, output-oriented democrats will typically suppose that the determinations of these procedures rightly represents the end of the matter.

C. How Much Legitimacy Does Aggregating Votes Confer?

At the end of the day, democratic procedures are expected to yield a determinate outcome.¹⁸ When a decision is required before agreement has been reached, the way in which democrats of all stripes move toward a decision is by aggregating opinions through voting of some sort or another. Even self-styled 'deliberative democrats' who adamantly oppose aggregative models of democracy in general thus occasionally find themselves resorting a mere show of hands in the end.¹⁹

The issue between output and input-based models of democracy lies not in whether or not votes are eventually taken and aggregations performed. Rather, the issue lies in how commonly and casually that is done; in how conclusive the aggregation is to be taken to be; and in the relative weight of

¹⁸Ordinarily, anyway. There are some things that we can afford simply to leave unsettled (Sunstein 1996). But those presumably are the exception rather than the rule; and in any event, note that even in Sunstein's examples there is always a determinate outcome as regards the case at hand (just not as regards the ratio underlying it).

¹⁹Cohen 1989, p. 23 (principle I 4). Goodin 2000, pp. 108-9.

legitimacy accorded outcomes by the aggregation itself, as compared to other elements of the decision process.

Output-based models of democracy are perfectly comfortable in aggregating early, and in regarding the results of those aggregations of votes as utterly determinative of legitimate policy. Those models, after all, suppose that the primary claim that any decision has to being democratically legitimate lies in certain attributes of the aggregation procedures — specifically, in how equal is the power accorded to each voter over the final decision. From this output-oriented perspective, aggregating votes is not an unfortunate necessity or a last resort. On the contrary, it is the primary locus of democratic legitimacy. In the purple prose of Adam Przeworski, 'It is the result of voting, not of discussion, that authorizes governments to govern, to compel'.²⁰

Input-based models beg to differ. Like deliberative democrats, input-based models of democracy more generally accept that from time to time they might have to resort to settling things by aggregating votes. But they settle things in that way only as a last resort. And they do so without any illusion that attributes of the aggregation procedure can in and of themselves completely underwrite the democratic credentials of the decision process. For input-democrats, it is the openness of the process to everyone's inputs (as much as, or more than, how those inputs are rendered into outputs) that makes the process truly democratic.

Of course, to confer a final blessing on the results of any input-democratic process, a final vote (if only a call for 'unanimous consent that the

²⁰Przeworski 1998, p. 142; 1999, p. 40; cf. Cohen 1989 and Dryzek 2000, pp. 38 ff.

proposal be adopted') is characteristically taken. But when the input-democratic process has worked well, that final vote serves merely as final ratification of decisions which have been reached — and legitimated — primarily through those other means.

Hence the difference between input and output-oriented models of democracy. Both may (and maybe even characteristically do) end up voting on things. But whereas output-democrats suppose that the final vote is the be-all and end-all to the legitimation of the decision, input-democrats see the primary locus of legitimacy as lying elsewhere. Like output-democrats, input-democrats might in extremis end up genuinely 'settling things' by aggregating votes. But they resort to those blunt instruments only when strictly necessary, and without any illusion that mere aggregations of votes will necessarily be ultimately determinative or fully legitimating.

Input democrats attach much more importance to what precedes the vote. They see it as a moral mistake to 'rush to a vote', gratuitously foreclosing further inputs and deliberation in circumstances in which we could well afford to take more time for further discussion. Output democrats, in contrast, assess everything in terms of the 'bottom line': the vote, and the equal power that is manifest in it. Rushing for that bottom line as if nothing else mattered, and regarding the question as firmly closed and the outcome as fully legitimate just as soon as a bottom-line vote count has once been taken, truly constitutes the 'arrogance of aggregation'.

III. Institutional Embodiments: Contrasting the Limiting Cases

Institutionally, of course, there are a great many different ways of operationalizing democratic aggregation rules. From the perspective of output-oriented theories of democracy, however, what matters across all those variants is simply equalizing (insofar as possible) power (or influence or whatever) over the ultimate resolution, across the entire citizenry. As shorthand, let's dub this output-oriented desiderata one of 'equal power over the bottom line'.

This fixation on the 'bottom line' leaves output-oriented theories of democracy open to a range of institutional forms that would be anathema to other theories of democracy. Input-oriented theories are relatively more interested in the whole process of decision, and they would be relatively more unaccepting of institutional forms that gave the people power (even if it were perfectly equal power) over just the very last stage of the process. That would be absolutely fine by output-oriented theories, in contrast, just so long as power at that point really were equal.

A. Schumpeterian Democracy: An Output-oriented Paradigm

To make the contrast concrete, note that output-oriented theories of democracy are capable of endorsing Schumpeterian democracy in a way input-oriented theories are not. Suppose that the 'competitive struggle for people's votes' really does give each voter equal power over elected officials and, through that, over the policies that they enact.²¹ (That is a tall claim: but let's grant it for the sake of argument, here.²²) Were that the case, then the demands of output democracy would have been satisfied — even though there is nothing remotely democratic about the inputs into the processes of policy development.

The hallmark of Schumpeterian democracy, recall, is that all the work of policy development is all done within teams of elites constituted as political parties. Those teams prepare policy packages which they then offer to voters at the election. The role of voters is confined simply to choosing among the policy packages put to them by those competing teams. Within this starkly Schumpeterian vision, voters themselves have absolutely no input: they merely exercise control over outputs, through their control over which team is installed in government.²³

²¹Schumpeter 1950, ch. 12. Dahl's (1956, ch 3) formal characterization of 'polyarchy' is essentially the same. The Schumpeterian model is now taken to constitute the principal alternative to populist democracy (Quinton 1967, ch 9; Plamenatz 1973, ch. 4), and economic theorists of democracy profess substantially unqualified allegiance to it (Riker 1983; Przeworski 1999).

²²cf. Macpherson 1977, ch. 4.

²³Or in an even more watered-down variant, policy might be developed wholly within a government bureaucracy under ministerial direction, with voters being asked merely to indicate retrospectively their approval (or otherwise) of what has transpired during the incumbents' period in office (Fiorina 1981).

To coin a slogan, output democrats say, 'What matters is what happens at the end of the day, not what happens along the way'. Of course, output democrats are not stupidly insensitive to agenda-setting and the ways in which some outputs can be ruled out right from the start. All of that clearly does matters — to the outputs, among many other things. What output democrats would say is this: as long as everyone has equal power over what eventually comes out of the political process, it does not matter how the process produces that result.

Thus, Schumpeterian parties which hypothetically anticipate people's preferences could serve the purposes of output democrats equally well as real people inputting their real preferences — just so long as the parties' anticipations prove accurate.²⁴ Similarly as regards agenda-setting: Schumpeterian parties setting agendas for themselves, in anticipation of people's preferences but without any actual input at that point from people themselves, would be just fine with output-democrats — again, just so long as those anticipations prove accurate in the end.

Within Schumpeter's model, the 'competitive struggle for people's votes' is supposed to provide the mechanism which ensures these results. That is what provides parties with the motivation to try to anticipate people's preferences correctly; that is what presumably ensures that parties whose anticipations are more accurate in those regards are selected for office, and those whose anticipations are systematically less accurate are weeded out.

²⁴Or anyway, just so long as he anticipations of at least one party contesting the next election do so.

Whether or not the mechanism actually works that way is of course an empirical question, and one which there are reasons aplenty to doubt.²⁵ My point here is an analytic rather than an empirical one, however. Supposing the competitive struggle for people's votes really did have the effects envisaged by Schumpeter, then that thin form of democracy would be all that output democrats would strictly require.

B. Consultative Democracy: An Input-oriented Paradigm

Whereas Schumpeterian democracy might be the most dramatic embodiment of output democracy, Scandinavian-style consultative democracy might be regarded as the most dramatic embodiment of the input-democratic ideal.

My model of consultative democracy will be a pastiche, compiled from various secondary sources and papering over interesting differences among the Nordic countries. Furthermore, although constructed out of Scandinavian materials in the first instance, the model is not confined to Scandinavia. Lowi's 'interest group pluralism' in the US, Beer's Britain 'in the collectivist age', Lijphart's 'consociational democracy' and even Schmitter's 'corporatist intermediation' all seem substantially similar in certain respects which are highly relevant to the distinction I here want to draw.²⁶

Scandinavian politics (and 'consensus models' more generally²⁷) display various attributes, most of which are beside my present point. Thus,

²⁵Ranging from imperfect information among voters to barriers to entry leading to imperfect competition among parties.

²⁶Lowi 1969. Beer 1965; cf. Goodin 1982. Lijphart 1975; 1999. Schmitter 1977.

²⁷Lijphart 1999, chs 2-3.

for example, there is a drive for compromise (if not literal consensus), in place of overt conflict.²⁸ There is bargaining, but its tone is accomodative rather than adversarial.²⁹ The political style is 'inclusionary' rather than exclusionary. Representation is proportional rather than majoritarian. And so on.³⁰

True and important though all that is, it is another feature of Nordic democracy upon which I here want to focus. That is its broadly consultative nature.³¹ In his classic essay describing the interplay of 'numerical democracy and corporate pluralism' in Norway, Stein Rokkan describes how

the Cabinet has increasingly had to take on the role of mediator between the conflicting interests in the national community.... [I]t can rarely if ever force through decisions solely on the basis of its electoral power but has to temper its policies in complex consultations and bargains with the major interest organizations. ...[T]he government

²⁸Rostow 1955, ch. 8. Torgersen 1970. Elder, Thomas and Arter 1982. Anton 1969, p. 94; 1980, ch. 8. In Eckstein's (1966, p. 194) terms, Norway is characterized by community rather than consensus: 'Community ... does not make for cohesion in the same ways as consensus. The latter obviates the need for searching out agreements, while the former makes for cohesion rather through norms that facilitate the quest for agreements — for example, by putting a high value on agreeing as an end in itself, even where men are manifestly divided..., or by cultivating a certain political considerateness of others: deference to their expertise or experience, sympathy with their special interests, or reluctance to raise issues that might exacerbate feelings of hostility of any kind and so prevent agreements even where they might be reached'.

²⁹In terms borrowed from Mansbridge (1980). Thus, for example, remarking upon 'the predominant decision-making style' in Norway, Eckstein (1966, pp.158-9) speaks of 'the high valuation of very broad agreements, a kind of collegiality in a much wider sense. This involves not merely the valuation of consensus, which obviates any need for searching out common ground. More important, it involves a stress upon the reconciliation of men of different interests and persuasions, a tendency to treat even opponents as colleagues. The depth of that value is reflected in the language: the Norwegian word for a body of rules is vedtekt, and that word derives from vedta, "to agree to"; a decision resulting in a rule thus is not something that a decision maker takes but something that affected parties manage to agree on.'

³⁰Strom 1990, ch. 6. Kvavik 1976. Shaffer 1998.

³¹This may be related to those other features, either as cause or consequence: that is a matter I here want to leave simply as an open question.

has over the years built up a large network of consultative boards and councils for the representation of all the relevant interests.³²

Cynically, that may be only a matter of trying to coopt into the decision process groups which could block subsequent implementation of any of its decisions.³³ And from the point of view of genuinely participatory democracy, certainly it is embarrassingly true that Scandinavian-style consultative democracy is based on groups rather than citizens.³⁴ Again, let us leave all that to one side and concentrate instead upon consultation as a generic practice.

Consultation involves what Johan P. Olsen calls a process of 'sounding out' — that, as distinct from a process of 'voting'.³⁵ Rather than pressing matters to a prompt resolution, decision-makers take their time. They feel each other out; they tentatively float trial balloons; they adjust their own positions in light of what they anticipate the reactions of others will be. Through successive mutual adjustments of that sort people converge: not so much on common preferences as on common perceptions of the feasible set. When the feasible set has become sufficiently small, the choice largely tends to make itself.³⁶ Votes, when they come, turn out to be substantially anti-climatic.

The most concrete manifestation is the 'remiss' procedure. (While the description that follows pertains specifically to Sweden, similar procedures are

³²Rokkan 1966, pp. 107-8. The pattern is not confined to Norway: see e.g. Damgaard and Eliassen 1980; Gustafsson and Richardson 1980.

³³Selznick 1949; Anton 1980, pp. 163-5. Rokkan (1966, p. 108) has something like this in mind, as suggested by a passage elipsed from the text quoted above, and he further explicates this in his subsequent essay, 'Votes count, resources decide' (Rokkan 1975). This is just the old principle, which Przeworski (1999, pp. 48-9) borrows from Condorcet, that we ought 'place authority where lies the force'.

³⁴Ruin 1974. Buksti and Eliassen 1979.

³⁵Olsen 1972; 1983, pp. 112-5, building on a sketchy model developed for very different purposes by Thompson and McEwan 1958, p. 30.

³⁶cf. Elster 1986, p. 22.

found throughout Scandinavia.³⁷) In Sweden, proposals for any major policy changes are submitted 'to all parties or organizations likely to be affected by the proposals, or likely to have an interest in responding to them.... [O]n major proposals the "affected organizations" can quite literally number in the hundreds'. In 1974, for example, 'more than 5000 remiss comments were generated for the 188 government bills submitted'.³⁸

The Commissions channeling these consultations — perhaps 75 new ones each year, each of them sitting for perhaps two-and-a-half years — typically contain representatives of political parties and interest organizations who 'keep their respective leaderships informed about developments'.³⁹ Although the process is highly open to group inputs, in other respects it operates very much 'in a completely closed circle'.⁴⁰ The operative rule is, 'Fight in private'.⁴¹ The upshot is that 'by the time the public debate gets started — in connection with the publication of the commission report — consensus has often been reached on essential points'.⁴²

³⁷Lægreid and Roness 1996. Kvavik 1976, ch. 4. Elder et al. 1982, pp. 182-3. Damgaard and Eliassen 1980.

³⁸Anton 1980, pp. 163-4. This leads to a distinctive sort of policy-making style: 'policymaking is extraordinarily deliberative, involving long periods of time during which more or less constant attention is given to some problem by well trained specialists. It is rationalistic, in that great efforts are made to develop the fullest possible information about any given issue, including a thorough review of historical experiences as well as the range of alternative suggested by scholars in and out of Sweden. It is open, in the sense that all interested parties are consulted before a decision is finally made. And it is consensual, in that decisions are seldom made without the agreement of virtually all parties to the' (Anton 1969, p. 94).

³⁹Meijer 1969, pp. 109, 114.

⁴⁰Meijer 1969, p. 114.

⁴¹Anton 1980, p. 173. The precept is further explicated as follows: 'Strong disagreement over proposals for change is both unavoidable and useful, but expression of such disagreement should be confined to the closed committee rooms or other information settings in which negotiations can proceed in private'.

⁴²Meijer 1969, p. 115; he goes on to say, 'About three-fourths of all commissions — including those with Riksdag representation — manage to present unanimous proposals...'

One may well raise an eyebrow at the way in which 'vitaly important discussions between the political parties, interest organizations and government in a democratic society are carried on behind closed doors and out of the view of the public'.⁴³ Democratically speaking, perhaps such consultations ought not be confined to group representatives but ought instead be opened to individual members of the public at large at a much earlier stage of the proceedings. It is no part of my brief here to defend those particulars of Nordic democracy — or even to assert that my reading of the secondary sources is as accurate as a characterization of the way things there actually work (or ever worked).

My aim instead is to extract from these materials a stylized account of how an idealized form of consultative politics might work. For those purposes, I propose to leave it as an open question who is to be consulted: whether just affected parties or all interested parties; whether just representatives of groups or all members of the groups; and so on. I propose also to leave open the question of how the results of the consultation actually affect the policy process: whether the opinions offered are regarded merely as advice or something stronger (warnings or threats or promises); whether the consultation is to be regarded as a straw poll or as being more binding; and so on.⁴⁴ I propose, finally, to leave open the aim of the consultation: whether it is supposed to produce a consensus or merely to canvass opinion. Let us set aside all those

⁴³Meijer 1969, p. 115.

⁴⁴Anton (1980, pp. 118-9) quotes one of the senior civil servants he interviewed as remarking, 'We have heard some talk about not making decisions here in Stockholm without consulting with these neighborhood associations. That's fine — you should always consult as widely as possible. But you cannot, in my opinion, take decision-making authority away from the agencies ...' which are formally vested with that authority.

issues, in order to try to envisage what consultation as such might accomplish for us, democratically speaking.

Bracketing out all that, what we are left with is simply this. Firstly, consultation functions to generate inputs into the policy process. Secondly, the broader the consultation the broader — the more varied, but also the more representative — the inputs.

What impact those inputs might actually have on the eventual decision depends upon various further features of the policy process and how it translates inputs into outputs. Hence it remains an open question whether increasing opportunities for input in this way actually gives people greater (much less equal) 'power over the bottom line'.

For output-oriented theorists whose primary notion of democracy is 'equal power over the bottom line', increasing opportunities for input in these ways does not necessarily (though it may well contingently) produce any increase in democracy. From another perspective, though, it makes perfectly good sense to describe such consultative procedures as 'democratizing' the policy process. The broader the consultation, the more people and groups whose opinions are represented in the policy process; the broader the consultation, the more representative the representations, both in their 'central tendency' and in their variation around that central tendency. And those consequences of the consultative process surely do speak to deep democratic concerns.

Just as Schumpeterian democracy constitutes an extreme case of what output-democrats might be prepared to endorse, so too does 'toothless consultations' constitute an extreme case of what input-democrats might be prepared to endorse. Democratizing the process, even if that has no systematic

linkage to democratizing the outputs, might in a pinch be sufficient to satisfy input-democratic ends.⁴⁵ Concretely, input-democrats might be happy with Scandinavian-style consultative politics, even if being consulted provides no assurance that people's opinions will have any impact on the eventual decision.

IV. An Irrelevance?

Such a flaccid form of input democracy might seem deeply inconsequential. Making submissions which others are obliged to receive, and maybe even to read — but which they are perfectly at liberty then to ignore — might seem to amount to little more than idle talk.

Any such supposition would be wrong, I think. Before proceeding to explicate my reasons for thinking that, however, let me first offer what I regard as a compelling analogy in defence of the democratic centrality of consultation, toothless though it may be.

A. Democratic Free Speech: An Analogy

The analogy is just this. Notice that the toothless consultation just described has exactly the same structure as the 'right to free speech' — which is something we ordinarily (and rightly) regard as absolutely central to democratic politics.

⁴⁵In asking Why People Obey the Law, Tyler (1990) similarly finds that people are much more concerned with process values than they are with the substance of the statute.

There are various ways to ground the right to free speech. One is in the speaker's right to speak; another is in the listener's right to hear.⁴⁶ Whichever way we run the story, however, the crucial thing to notice is that listeners are never obliged to listen.⁴⁷ Your right is to a soapbox, not to an audience.

Nevertheless, we think the right to speak freely is absolutely central to democratic government. Why? Because democracy entails both a right for citizens of a democracy to try to influence one another and a right for citizens to try to find out what one another thinks.⁴⁸ We may think it unfortunate if people do not exercise those rights. We may think our fellow citizens are remiss — or even that our democracy is in peril — if people do not seek out and listen to one another's opinions in that way. We may think it is a good idea to engineer things in such a way as to encourage them to do so.⁴⁹ But democratically desirable though it may be for ordinary citizens to listen to one another, we would never think of imposing a legal duty upon them to do so, or of sanctioning them for failing to do so. In no country in the world is political inattentiveness a hanging (or even a fining) offence. In no country in the world is it even so much as a misdemeanour to fail to read the daily newspaper.

Thus we think the right to speak freely is democratically crucial, even if no one is necessarily listening — and hence even if what we say does not necessarily make any material difference to the decisions that eventuate. All of which is just to say, the theory of democratic free speech is predicated on

⁴⁶Sunstein 1993, esp. ch. 5.

⁴⁷In Hohfeldian terms, your 'right of free speech' entails a correlative duty on others 'not to interfere with your speaking freely': not a duty 'to listen to what you have to say'.

⁴⁸Not to mention the right to tell one's representatives what one thinks, which is how the Australian High Court magicked up a right of free political speech from the Australian Constitution's guarantee of 'representative government' (Mason 1992).

⁴⁹Through doctrines that streets and parks — and, in the extension Sunstein (2001) proposes, cyberspace — are public places, open to all.

precisely the assumption that inputs matter, even if they make no difference to outputs.

B. A Condition Necessary but Not Sufficient?

The conventional way of making sense of that curious fact would be to say that free speech is a necessary but not sufficient condition of democracy. There are good reasons for thinking that the political system cannot be democratic unless people are allowed to communicate with one another freely; but while democracy surely requires that much, it requires more than that as well. It requires that political outputs be 'systematically responsive' to the preferences that citizens thus express.⁵⁰ And the same would presumably be true of input democracy, by extension: that too may be a necessary condition for democracy; but equally surely and for the same reason, it cannot be a sufficient condition. Or so the conventional wisdom would suppose.

Of course as I said at the outset, input democracy is contingently closely connected with output democracy. Democratizing inputs contributes mightily to democratizing outputs. Expanding the franchise is quintessentially a matter of giving everyone an input; but doing so helps to give everyone equal power over the bottom line as well. Ensuring that elections are not bought ensures that the process is open to inputs of everyone, not just prospective purchasers; but that also obviously helps to promote output democracy, understood as equal power over the bottom line as well. Efforts to deny media magnates undue influence in elections protects the inputs of ordinary people, but it also helps to equalize their power over the bottom line as well. In all these ways, measures designed to democratize inputs also democratize outputs, and conversely.

⁵⁰May 1978.

Or, again, consider the problem of agenda-setting. Nothing can emerge as the output of a democratic process unless someone has first put it onto the agenda⁵¹; there, most dramatically, outputs are tightly constrained by inputs. Indeed, throughout the decision process more generally, which options are selected depend upon inputs — what arguments are offered, what pressures applied and so on. Given all these ways in which inputs shape outputs, the best way to achieve output-democratic goals might well be to equalize inputs. At the very least, input-oriented strategies would seem to form a very important part of any larger strategy for equalizing power over outputs.

Output democrats would insist that they do not constitute the whole of the story, though. Democracy cannot be 'inputs all the way down', simply because at the end of the day inputs must be transformed into outputs; and how democratic the regime will be depends crucially (even if perhaps not wholly) upon the character of the rules governing that process. In that crucial respect, output democracy is not coterminous with input democracy. Rather, it adds something that input democracy cannot conceivably provide.

Insofar as input democracy differs from output democracy, output-democrats would say, input democracy would seem to be necessarily inferior, democratically speaking. To assert the contrary — that we should accord higher priority to input democracy than to output democracy, when the two diverge — would seem perverse in the extreme. It would seem to amount to saying that it is more important for people to have a voice than for the people to have any ultimate, determinative say in what happens to them. That seems

⁵¹As Schattschneider (1960, p. 66) says, 'the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power'.

plainly contrary to the fundamental democratic impulse. Whatever reason democrats have for wanting people to have input into processes, the same reasons must surely lead them to want the outputs actually to be responsive to those inputs — and indeed to be systematically rather than just incidentally so.

C. How Inputs Might Matter

I hope to overcome that sense of perversity, by pointing to one crucial way in which input democracy might actually contribute toward ensuring that sort of 'systematic responsiveness' which is required by output democracy.

My argument builds on a familiar proposition: inputs systematically shape outputs through the dynamics of political discourse. The very process of discussion inevitably serves to reframe the issues for interlocutors, systematically causing each to take into account the preferences and perspectives of each other.

The point is not merely that discourse leads to convergence, though. The deeper point is that this process of convergence is systematically responsive to the preferences and perspectives of everyone involved, in precisely the way democratic aggregation procedures are crucially supposed to be from the output-democrat's perspective. The fact that the process operates internally (within each interlocutor's head) rather than externally (through some vote-counting machine) surely is of no consequence, democratically speaking. Democratically, all that matters systematic responsiveness: and that, I argue, can be accomplished at either site.

Hard-headed realists might scoff. Recall this much-loved anecdote recounted in Andrew Shonfeld's Modern Capitalism:

I recall a British trade union leader after an organized visit to Sweden — there were several such visits undertaken by the British trade union movement in the early 1960s in an attempt to discover the secret of Swedish labour's success — expressing his frustration over the whole business. The secret was either too banal or too opaque to yield to intelligent investigation. 'All they can tell you when you ask them how they do it', he said, describing some particularly difficult decision which involved the concerted action of competing interest groups, 'is: "We has a meeting". *We has a meeting!* I'd like to see how they'd make out with our blokes over here'.⁵²

But let scoffers reflect for a moment upon what actually goes on when one 'has a meeting', where one is obliged to sit through an 'exchange of views'. Of course it is possible just to argue your own brief and ignore theirs altogether, 'turning a deaf ear' to the other. More typically, though, the requirements of the context require you at least to pretend you are listening, engaging and answering one another in good faith. And even if you are doing so only half-heartedly or strategically, you inevitably end up at least partially internalizing the other's point of view.

Discourse theorists and deliberative democrats want to dress this up as a higher-order tenet of communicative ethics.⁵³ But there is no need for anything nearly so grand or anything nearly so high-minded. This 'internal-reflective' aspect of deliberation — this 'putting oneself in the place of the other' — is a mundane feature of conversation in all forms. It is what allows us to make sense of one another's utterances at all.

⁵²Shonfield 1965, p. 199.

⁵³Habermas 1995, p. 117. Midgaard et al. 1973.

It is also, note, something that can happen in non-discursive settings. Having to engage with another, face-to-face, might force us to try to 'put ourselves into the place of the other'. But so too might merely having (even just 'having a duty') to read submissions from another oblige us to try to internalize the other's perspective in order just to make sense of the written words.⁵⁴

D. Mutual Co-optation

What democratic theorists often fear about consultative practices is that they will result in 'co-optation'.⁵⁵ Oppositional groups will be incorporated into the process; having participated in the process of making the decision, they are held 'hostage' to it and cannot credibly repudiate it. That is a deft political trick for stilling dissident voices, which is why democratic theorists are so wary of it.

That trick can easily backfire, though. Just as gerontologists tell us aged couples can fall into patterns of 'co-dependency', so too can the co-optor and the co-optee in administrative politics. When engaged in protracted consultations, each comes to internalize the perspective of the other.⁵⁶ Neither party is inclined to force the other into a corner, not because the other

⁵⁴Goodin 2000. In the limiting case, we might come to internalize the perspective of the 'naturally disenfranchised' (future generations and ecosystems) in some such way (Goodin 1996).

⁵⁵Selznick 1949. Goodin 1980, pp. 52-6. Saward 1992.

⁵⁶Consider, for example, the evidence from psych labs that people are substantially more inclined to cooperate with one another in Prisoner's Dilemma games if they have had a chance for just a little incidental small-talk before the game begins (Orbell et al. 1988).

has the power successfully to resist, but rather because the first party is no longer quite so convinced that that is right thing to do. It is not that the other party has a 'veto': it is just that the other party is seen, suddenly, as genuinely 'having a point'.

This model might provide an alternative account of what goes on in Scandinavian consultative democracy. From the outside, anyway, it is hardly credible that political authority is so fragile that all the multifarious groups that are consulted have power to block implementation of policies, and therefore strictly need to be squared in advance for any power-political reason. Even if they did, it is hardly credible that it would systematically take two or more years to cut a deal with them all, through the ordinary processes of political bargaining.

Much more plausibly, what is going on there would seem to be genuine conversations, where everyone genuinely comes to see (if not completely internalize) each other's point of view, and genuinely comes to feel some internalized need to try to accommodate it in the ultimate resolution. That is to say, the 'mutual co-option' inevitably involved in genuine political discourse is what is driving the phenomenon.⁵⁷

Notice, now, the consequence of all that from an output-oriented perspective. The initial consultation may have been a relatively toothless proceedings. The groups being consulted might have had no real power outside the process to make trouble for policymakers; they may have been given no real power within the process to block or delay decisions there, either. The procedure might have been wholly 'toothless' in that respect.

⁵⁷Goodin 2000; cf. Goodin 1980, pp. 105-8.

Still, once it got underway, the process of 'mutual co-optation' might afford otherwise powerless people some real power over the policy process and the outputs that eventually emerge from it.

That power might de facto rather than de jure, and the dynamics might be more mental than material. Still, power is power, and more subtle forms are often all the stronger for that very reason.

IV. Conclusion

Most of democratic theory is devoted to equalizing power of a particular sort: power over political outcomes. The forms of power inequality that concern us are many and varied, as are democratic devices designed to rectify them. We want to insulate political outcomes from inequalities of status; and toward that end we institute rules of 'one person one vote' and secret ballots. We want to insulate political outcomes from inequalities of wealth; and toward that end we institute prohibitions against buying offices or votes. Various other devices described from time to time as democratic — ranging from public education to public broadcasting to second chambers — might all be seen in similar fashion as being designed, essentially, to prevent political outcomes from being influenced by factors we regard as illegitimate. And the various 'power indices' that political scientists calculate are all essentially aimed at providing a 'box score' telling us how successful we are in our efforts at equalizing influence over ultimate outcomes.

Without in the least wanting to denigrate all those important efforts, I have here drawn attention to another way in which we might go about

democratizing the political process. That approach focuses on democratizing the inputs to the process, rather than focusing on the outputs.

We cannot do away with democratic aggregation rules, and output democrats rightly insist that those should accord everyone equal power as nearly as possible. Input democrats agree but add that aggregation is not the 'be all' (even if perhaps it is, by definition, the 'end all') of democratic politics. We can and should try to avoid preemptive resort to the mechanical aggregation of opinions, for as long as possible. We should try to encourage genuine conversation and to let a genuine consensus emerge where we can; we should abstain from forcing matters prematurely to a conclusion, insofar as we possibly can.

By insisting that we should 'discuss while we can, vote when we must', input-democratic thinking marks a sharp contrast to our ordinary output-democratic inclination to look only to the bottom line. If the analysis I have been offering is correct, however, democratizing inputs might go some considerable distance to democratizing outputs — and systematically so, given the logic of conversational dynamics in consultative situations. If so, then this proves to be yet another instance in which the best way to achieve what we want might not be to lock our gaze on the end in view: here, as elsewhere, it may well be better to go round about.⁵⁸

⁵⁸After the fashion of Robinson (1964, p. 19) and Ibsen's *Per Gynt*.

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