

Modern democracy cannot be conceived only in terms of political equality, mass participation, competition, or tolerance. Nor can it be defined as a system where the public good is determined through rational or ethical deliberation. All these are, at least in principle, possible even in autocratic or oligarchic systems. What is peculiar for modern democracy is that opposition and dissent are not only tolerated, but they are recognized as *necessary* aspects of the system. Governments need oppositions, because their right to govern is legitimized only through the presence of an opposition. The task of the opposition in a democratic system is to express distrust: to criticize the actions of the government and to provide an alternative. The opposition *institutionalizes distrust*, and, paradoxically, the presence of this institutionalized distrust is, for the citizens, one important reason to *trust* the democratic system. Insofar as the opposition is incompetent, or bribed or otherwise made toothless, the system appears as less democratic, and the democratic legitimacy of the government is consequently diminished.

The idea that an organized or institutionalized distrust embodied in the opposition could ultimately be the basis of legitimacy is complex and even paradoxical. It is no wonder that the classical normative theories of democracy have not been able to conceptualize the role of opposition. The idea of democracy as the sovereignty of the People was born in the French Revolution. Typically it conceived the People as united and homogeneous. The Marxist and nationalist conceptions of democracy (for example, that of Carl Schmitt 1985; 2008) are direct descendants of this idea. Even when it was admitted that the “Will of the People” could, in practice, only mean the will of the majority, the unavoidable presence of a distrusting minority was conceived as a defect, a deviation from the pure ideal of democracy. The perfect democracy was, ideally, based on unanimity and a complete identity between the rulers and the ruled (see Rosanvallon 2006, ch 3.). There was no room for organized opposition in this conception.

The liberal version of popular sovereignty presented in John Locke’s *Second Treatise* (Locke

1988) was not based on the hypothetical identification of the rulers and the ruled. According to Locke, the government was based on *trust*. Trust was, unlike a contract or identity, an asymmetrical relationship. The people or the community could unilaterally withdraw its trust and replace the government by another. If the rulers refused to obey, the ruled had a right to resist the rulers, and if necessary, rise to arms. Nevertheless, trust was for Locke, the normal and natural situation. Distrust remained exceptional and external.

The *epistemic* conception of democracy as a method to find the true, best or most justified solutions to problems which concern all derives from Aristotle's *Politics*. There, Aristotle famously argues that a decision-making group may be wiser or better informed than any of its individual members. In *The Social Contract* Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed this idea in the following terms:

When in the popular assembly a law is proposed, what people is asked is not exactly whether it approves or rejects the proposal, but whether it is in conformity with the general will, which is their will. Each man, when giving his vote, states his opinion on that point; and the general will is found by counting votes. When therefore the opinion that is contrary to my own prevails, this proves neither more nor less than that I was mistaken, and that what I thought to be the general will was not so. (Rousseau 1973, p. 250)

In this conception, disagreement is the starting point. Yet, opposition becomes irrational and unjustified when the democratic decision has been made. The legitimacy of democratic decisions is based on the hypothesis that a democratic majority is more likely to find the correct solution than any individual voter or a sub-group of voters. Hence, post-decisional opposition must be a sign of irrational stubbornness. The contemporary theories of deliberative democracy (for example that of Jürgen Habermas 1986) are partly based on the epistemic conception. Habermas and his followers (Benhabib 1994; Cohen 1989) argue that in the ideal conditions constituted by free, unlimited discussion, the discussion partners would ultimately agree on reasons as well as on conclusions. This rational consensus would guarantee the truth or validity of the conclusions, for, ideally, it would incorporate into itself

all imaginable counter-objections and criticisms. The deliberative theorists are ready to admit that in the real life, disagreements are unavoidable. But, again, such disagreements only show that the democratic process falls short of the ideal. Again, the presence of a persistent opposition appears as a (perhaps unavoidable) defect.

Finally, the “realist” theorists of democracy (for example, Weber 1994, or Schumpeter 1962) conceive democracy in terms of power struggle. For them, struggle for power is the essence of all politics, and democratic competition is one form of it. The “realists” admit the unavoidability of disagreements in democratic politics. However, when conceptualizing democratic politics as “war by other means” they neglect an important difference between the democratic competition and other forms of power struggle. In democracy, unlike, say, in international politics, the relations between the competing parties are *internal* rather than purely external and contingent. True, parties compete for power. However, power in a democratic society is not simply an ability to realize one’s own will. The winning party, which forms the government, has power only because it is obeyed by the citizens, and it is obeyed (at least partly) because the citizens see its claim for power as legitimate; it deserves its power. It is perceived as legitimate because it has temporarily won its opponents in a fair competition, yet those opponents may challenge it again. Hence, the permanent presence of an opposing force is a necessary condition for the power of the government. Within the democratic political body, the idea is thus not to press into consensus, or to silence the parties which do not belong to the government after the last elections. The winners are winners because there are losers who recognize their defeat, but still continue to disagree. While competition for power may be a near-universal phenomenon (as the “realists” claim), this mutual dependence between competitors is a unique property of democracies.

Opposition as an internal controller

I would characterize democracy as a *necessarily contradictory whole*, in which the parties are internally related to each others. The idea is to continue the struggle over matters which concern “all”. This internal struggle between mutually contradicting parties serves

democratic purposes. There can, of course, be no opposition without a government which it opposes, but equally, there cannot be a *democratic* government without an active opposition. The opposition provides, by its public criticism and inspection of the government's actions, a "system of checking" of whether the government is doing what it has promised to do and whether it is acting in the best interest of "all". In fact, the role of the opposition is to try to reveal that the government is actually not acting in the best interest of the community as a whole, but, instead, pursues more or less parochial aims i.e. it pursues *too much* the aims of the party which has last won in the elections. Interestingly, a system which comprises of a government, checked and radically criticised by a sort of "internally external" opposition that also provides an alternative choice for voters in the next election, is considered a *trustworthy* democratic system. While an *external* controller, for example a Supreme Court or a body of scientists or experts, are supposed to present impartial, disengaged, neutral and apolitical ("power-free") evaluation, the role of opposition is to be *fully engaged* concerning the things under discussion. One important aspect of the opposition is to criticise the rationale, by which the government legitimizes its decisions, for being biased or parochial.

In her article 'Unpolitical Democracy' Nadia Urbinati (2009) discusses the role of contestation and criticism in various theories of democracy (for example, in those of Pierre Rosanvallon and Philip Pettit). She promotes the idea that democracy, as a system in which things that concern "all" are decided by all, should not diminish the role of partisan, engaged opposition. If the evaluation of things is transferred away from the area where politically engaged parties confront each others, into an area where neutral parties are supposed to evaluate or judge the public good impartially (from the point of view of an apolitical judge or a scientist), democratic decision making is compromised. Power becomes hidden behind the veil of a neutral judge or some other external evaluator. Issues under discussion become easily divided into "political" and "apolitical" parts, into issues which can be struggled upon politically and issue which are thought to belong to the sphere of external evaluation. Urbinati writes:

It prefigures a transformation of the meaning of politics according to goals and criteria that recall the nineteenth-century utopia of the rational power of the

experts. It suggests that politics is a cognitive practice for reaching true outcomes, solving problems, and moreover eradicating “politically-relevant reasonable disagreement. (Urbinati 2009, 74)

For Urbinati, one problem with the external controlling is that experts typically give evaluations on a restricted frame of questions, the framing of which is not part of the political process itself:

in the deliberative fora the formation of the agenda and the frame of questions to be discussed by the selected citizens are not part of the political process. They are instead kept outside the forum as the task of the mediators and organizers of these deliberative experiments. In clear violation of the democratic principle of autonomy, both the issues to be discussed without prejudice, and the procedures regulating the discussion, are not decided and chosen by the participants. (Urbinati 2009, 74)

The practice of splitting issues into political and apolitical aspects is not itself part of the democratic (political) process. It is done externally by actors which are not themselves exposed to democratic criticism. The grounding idea of democracy is that it exercises autonomous power over things which concern “all” (*res publica*). There is no party external, beyond or not accessible to it, which would determine the problems to be discussed, or which would set the frame, outline or circumscribe the politically relevant aspects of things under discussion. When issues are divided into those aspects which are discussed politically and into those which are left to neutral, external experts, it can be forgotten that there are hardly any aspects which do not relate to questions of power or carry ethical implications. Few aspects are purely technical, power-free or abstract. Moreover, even that neutral parties, like judges, scientists or various selected citizen bodies are important sources of knowledge and opinions, they are not external in the sense of being completely “power-free”. Scientific or legal expertise is always practiced in a cultural context and, hence, it should not be considered as beyond democratic criticism and analysis.

Hegel and the dialectics between the self and the Other

The claim defended here is that the relationship between the government and the distrusting, internal opposition can be understood in terms of Hegel's dialectics. At the first sight, Hegel is not a promising starting point for democratic theorizing. His main political work, *Philosophy of Right*, is not a particularly democratic work. Admittedly, Hegel does defend representative institutions, constitution, and the basic rights. Thus, the once widespread claim that Hegel was simply an apologist of the contemporary Prussian state is mistaken, for Hegel's Prussia had none of these. Moreover, in the lectures held before the publication of *Philosophy of Right* Hegel *did* discuss the principle of opposition (see, for example, Hegel 1974, 707-9). Nevertheless, in the published version of *Philosophy of Right* Hegel conceived the State basically in terms of a unity. Conflicts appear at the level of the civil society where parochial aims are pursued; nevertheless, they are superseded and reconciled *rationally* at the level of the State. Thus, it is not surprising that both Hegel's right-wing adherents and his liberal and leftist critics have emphasized the unifying aspects of his philosophy: disagreements are solved by rational communication. Even his radical interpreters, who – like Alexandre Kojève – have emphasized the more conflictual aspects of Hegel's theory, have seen a “homogeneous state” as the ultimate outcome of the historical process.

However, other readings are possible. The British Idealist political theorist Sir Ernest Barker (1942; 1951), while accepting the standard liberal criticism of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, nevertheless argued that the other aspects of Hegel's philosophy had democratic potential:

His conception of the eternal debate of thesis and antithesis, and of the opposition of thought to thought in the operation of Mind [*Geist*], involves the necessary conclusion that debate and discussion must always be at work in any society of minds, now emphasizing this idea, and now emphasizing that, but always seeking to achieve a synthesis, or as we also say, in one of our common terms, ‘to find a compromise’. If we think of political parties as representing thesis and antithesis, and of Parliament as seeking to find a reconciling

synthesis, we can defend parliamentary democracy in terms of Hegelian ideas. We can even argue that Hegel himself was untrue to his own ideas when he became a political absolutist. He failed to see that the sovereign thing in political thought, as in all the thought of the world is the *process* of thought itself, as it works its way between the clashing rocks of thesis and antithesis. (Barker 1951, p. 23)

According to my interpretation, the dialectics between the self and the Other, presented in Hegel's earlier work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, offers still a valid theory of why the on-going clashing of thesis with antithesis is the base for democratic equality and freedom between people. An important instance of this dialectics appears in the contemporary parliamentary systems where the government clashes with the opposition. In the next chapter I will go shortly through Hegel's theory of the dialectics between the self and the Other. Then I will offer an interpretation of how it relates to the theme of democracy and distrust.

For Hegel, self-consciousness – in short, “self” – is a complex construction. The basic feature of the self is thinking. Thinking is situated: it is conditioned by time, place, cultural context and various individual, personal and material factors. Consequently, thinking makes up a limited, interpretative system, a *particular universe*. Thinking is a universalizing and generalizing activity, yet, at the same time it is parochial and limited. By conceptual and abstract thinking the thinker may obtain a critical distance towards itself and its cultural limits. However, even abstract thinking is situated because it is internally linked to, and it mediates with, the subjective parts of the thinking system. Thinking is always subjective. The Other is, like the self, a complex construction: subjective particularity is one of its features. Like the self, the Other is an interpretative, meaning-giving system: a particular universe. A grounding idea in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is that with the Other or, ideally, from a point of view which is constituted jointly by the self and the Other, the self can go over its respective limits. In fact, only by trying to see the world from the point of view of the Other, the self can acknowledge that it's own universe is particular and limited. With the Other, the self may go over its limits and see the world, including its own self, from a new perspective which can be called a more democratic perspective, even that democracy did not belong to Hegel's terminology. However, the new perspective is also a located

perspective. The self cannot rise above perspectivity *as such*, because subjectivity continues to be a basic feature of its thinking. (Hegel 1977, pp. 109-112)

Self's way to relate to the Other is, however, not easy. The relationship between the self and the Other can be called a *radical difference*, or, *mutual otherness*. It might, however, be also called a *radical similarity*. The Other is, like the self, its own, self-determining, internally differentiated system of subject-object-relations. Both the self and the Other are centres of their own universes. Consequently, both selves appear to be, from the point of view of the other, threatening. Freedom of the Other – the Other as a self-determining being and a universalizing, generalizing being (a being who has views about things which concern “all”) – appears as a threat. (Hegel 1977, pp. 111-119.)

Nevertheless, the dialectical narrative in *Phenomenology* shows that the self is not satisfied until it creates a relationship of reciprocal recognition with Other. What self yearns for most is freedom and only reciprocal recognition – or, actually an ethical society which is based on reciprocal recognition of parties which are “other” to each other – satisfies this yearning.

According to Hegel, the self strives for a contact with the Other because, ultimately, it wants to be free. Freedom includes various inter-related aspects such as epistemological freedom (knowledge which is not parochial, instead, constituted in mutual recognition, for self and for Other), inner freedom at a psychological level, and social freedom. For Hegel, the self can live a satisfactory life – at these various levels – only if it acknowledges Other as its equal and enters into a recognizing relationship with it. In recognizing the Other as an equal self and, reciprocally, recognizing itself as the Other's Other, the self is able to reconcile contradictions at the aforementioned levels. In Hegel, freedom means that people and societies can, both, reconcile contradictions, and, at the same time, see contradictions as the permanent part of a free, ethical society. This means that *both* the self and the Other, as bearers of mutually contradicting world-views, are recognized as valid sources of knowledge, views and opinions over things which concern “all”. A free society does not try to silence contradicting world-views because that would mean that some specific, parochial world-view, of some specific particular self, would gain a dominating position in the society.

Freedom as reciprocal recognition is a process where the existence of, and the on-going clashing together, of contradicting world-views are recognized as a permanent part of the society. Contradicting world-views clash together, yet, the clash is considered a source of freedom and good, ethical life. Mutually contradicting selves can all contribute to the constructing of the society, its basic principles, institutions and laws. The clashing together of mutually contradicting selves cannot be disposed of because, at any given time, the particular *synthesis* which governs or which has a hegemonic status in the society (i.e. displayed at the level of, for example, commonly shared beliefs) cannot take *all* possible views into consideration equally.

In Hegel, the complex structure of the thinking self is shown also in the complex structure of the things, which are thought by the self. *Thought* things are complex structures which means, for example that limited subjectivity is always an internal aspect of them. Things cannot be divided into parts which are external to each others in the sense that they would not affect each others. We can not bracket off subjective aspects from things and think of them as pure abstractions. When things are thought rationally, or as abstractions, subjective limitedness continues to be present, too. Things are complex constructions in which political, ethical, cultural and personal aspects are internally mediated with each other.

Hegel, democracy and distrust

According to my interpretation Hegel's seemingly abstract figures "self and "Other" may be seen to stand for groups, comprising of like-minded individuals. Thinking, which is the basic feature of both the self and the Other, does not develop in a social vacuum. Instead, individuals are, to a great extent, born into those "particular universes", which render them social subjects. By linguistic, communicative internalization of selfhood, individuals become thinking selves and subjects. Like-minded individuals can be thus seen to constitute the particular universes. These universes may be also called as discursive, cultural contexts. Within them meanings, ethical and moral principles and world-views are generated and kept alive by the individuals committing to them and reproducing them. Hegel suggests that in order for the society to be free, these groups as well as individuals comprising them, need to

acknowledge that there is an outside (Other) to their own group. In order for the society not to be parochially constituted – which would mean the suffocation of some groups and closing them out from amongst those who determine what the society as a whole is like – the groups and their world-views would need to clash together. This clashing together of one particular universe with another, or, one thesis with its antithesis, would mean that contradictions are acknowledged as an internal part of the society.

How can Hegel's theory of the need for contradicting parties to clash together inside a social community be seen to promote an idea of the need for an institutionalized distrust in democracy, embodied in the government-opposition-relationship? As said above, Hegel is often seen to promote the idea of unifying and synthesizing rationality as the way to reconcile disagreements at the level of the state. Theorists like Habermas, with his idea of communicative ethics, draws from this line of thought. To claim that Hegel's theory would support an idea of an *institutionalized distrust* and government-opposition- relationship would mean that conflict or distrust between parties, which decide about matters of state concerning "all", is seen as an *internal* aspect of a free society. Freedom as reciprocal recognition between its members would not be understood in terms of reaching consensus by rational communication only, say, in the ordinary way of continuing discussion until agreement, compromise or consensus is found. Instead, it would emphasize the clashing together – feature of the mutually recognizing parties as well as the idea that genuine and even passionate conflicts and distrust are a necessary part of how the parties relate to each other in order to produce ethically sound and free decisions concerning "all". This way to interpret Hegel's notion of freedom as the on-going clashing together of the self and the Other – thesis with its anti-thesis – implies that the syntheses are temporary and open for further debate and revision.

For Hegel, the self, as a thinker, is a complex system where different aspects influence each others *internally*. This implies, importantly, that rational thinking, also at the state level, is not neutral or impartial in the sense that it would take place in a power-free or apolitical vacuum. It also supports the idea that any synthesis, resulting from the clashing together of selves and Others with their theses, makes up a new thesis, a particular universe, which should be open to further dialectical revision. Every state-level synthesis is limited because

one of its aspects is material objectivity, i.e. the level of limited economical and material resources. When ever a synthesis is made, it is based not only on what the outcome is from the struggle between the conflicting parties in the last elections. When elections are over, the parties, forming the government, make decisions, on how various material resources are concretely distributed between all the members of the society. The government often also makes some alterations to laws, institutional principles and so forth, according to the deliberations of its member parties. In other words, the struggle between conflicting groups leads, through elections, to the formation of a new government and, by the government's deliberations, to some alterations at the level of the objective reality. The transformation of any synthesis into a new thesis, open to the criticism of opposition, takes place at this point. The government is formed by some parties, enough like-minded to be able to make decisions and compromises together and execute its will through administrative and bureaucratic bodies. The decisions must be particular and limited in order to mean something concrete. The decisions cannot be vague or ambivalent; otherwise they would give room for arbitrary interpretations and arbitrary application. Nevertheless, this rationality, shared by the "like-minded" members of the government renders the government also a "particular universe". The government provides rational arguments for the decisions it executes, and claims to act in the best interest of all. This claim becomes, however, the base for criticism - or, in Hegelian words claim for recognition - coming from those who claim that it, nevertheless, acts more in the interest of just some, not all. It needs to be checked and critically analyzed by its outside, and clash with its outside (the Other as opposition), in order for its rationality not to fall into parochialism which compromises the democratic idea that the state ought to be governed by "all".

The agonistic theory of democracy

The Hegelian dialectic insight of democracy, presented in this paper, resembles in some ways the *agonistic theory* of democracy. Especially the political theorist Chantal Mouffe has spoken for an idea of democracy in which a permanent, agonistic conflict between mutually contradicting parties (between "we" and "them") is considered as a constitutive and an indispensable feature. Mouffe's idea of the relationship between "we" and "them" resembles in some ways the dialectical relationship between the self and the Other, defended in this

text. However, there are important differences between the dialectical notion of democracy defended in this paper, and the theory of Chantal Mouffe. I shall argue that the idea of agonism as formulated by Mouffe is actually incoherent.

In criticizing consensus-oriented authors like Rawls or Habermas, Mouffe uses the following argument: The criticized authors try to solve the “paradox of democracy” by presenting a comprehensive theory of democracy, and claim that all consistent democrats should agree with them. However, an *actual* consensus on the truth of any particular interpretation of democracy would, in effect, destroy the agonistic tensions which are central for democracy. An agreement on the basic principles of democracy would stop the movement of democratic society, create a stasis. It is this very process, produced by the tensions and differences that is really important and valuable in democracy. Thus, all attempts to provide a comprehensive theory of democracy are (indirectly) self-defeating. If the correct, true theory of democracy were to be found, and if it were *generally accepted* it would undo the whole democracy. If a theory of what the relations between the various mutual “others” (the political subjects) were recognized by the political subjects themselves, there would be no attitude of exclusion any more. The political subjects (which constitute each others “others”) would not exclude each others any more from their vision of the ideal society, and try to gain universal recognition just for their own particular ideal any more. This kind of “reciprocally recognitive” attitude would undo the democracy itself:

To believe that a final resolution of conflicts is eventually possible – even if it is seen as an asymptotic approach to the regulative idea of a rational consensus – far from providing the necessary horizon of a democratic project, is something that puts it at risk. Indeed, such an illusion carries implicitly the desire for a reconciled society where pluralism is superseded. When it is conceived in such a way, pluralist democracy becomes a “self-refuting ideal” because the very moment of its realization would coincide with its disintegration (Mouffe 2000, 32)

For Mouffe, pluralism and difference are themselves positive goods. They are something we should “valorize” and “be thankful for” (Mouffe 1993, 139). All attempts to “close” the

democratic process are dangerous because conflicts and confrontations are the very essence of democracy:

One of the keys to the thesis of agonistic pluralism is that, far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence (Mouffe 2000, 103)

Of course, not any confrontation or conflict would do. Pure power-struggles between self-interested actors or clashes of forces between fanatical groups are not radical in the required sense. A radical agonist does not praise all conflicts. Democratic conflicts are, in a sense, always conflicts *about* democracy, about its content. They arise between principled and sincerely held views:

Without a plurality of competing forces which attempt to define the common good, and aim at fixing the identity of the community, the political articulation of the demos could not take place. (Mouffe, 2000, 56)

According to Mouffe, the existence of different *genuinely competing* conceptions is essential:

Ideally, such a confrontation should be staged around the diverse conceptions of citizenship which correspond to the different interpretations of the ethico-political principles: liberal-conservative, social-democratic, neo-liberal, radical-democratic, and so on. Each of them proposes its own interpretation of the 'common good'... A well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. (ibid., 103-4)

Thus, Mouffe shares the idea that a dialectical conflict is fundamental for democracy.

However, her own view remains thoroughly relativistic. No dialectical synthesis is possible. This makes her own position ambivalent. Obviously, all the proponents of the different democratic conceptions are expected to defend their own conception as *true* (correct, valid). Otherwise the views would not “clash”. The theorist of agonistic democracy appears here as a stage-master, as someone standing outside and above the confrontation. She knows that none of the protagonists playing their part in the democratic drama is actually defending the true view, for there cannot be any correct interpretation of the common good or the democratic basic principles – that was her starting point. Nevertheless, because the confrontation between different conceptions of citizenship and/or common good is the very condition of the existence of a working democracy, it is important that there are sufficiently many people around who sincerely hold these various convictions, however misguided they might be.

To conclude, Mouffe’s theory can be criticized by using the same form of argument she herself uses against Rawls and Habermas. The theory of agonistic democracy is self-defeating in the same way as the criticized theories are claimed to be. If all (or sufficiently many) citizens would actually accept the agonistic view that there are no justifiable solutions to the problems of justice and of common good, the essential agonism would disappear. In order to work, the agonistic democracy has to presuppose that most people do not share the agonist view. To put it in Hegelian terms, it presupposes a Lord-Bondsman-relationship.

For this reason, the agonistic theory cannot work as a basis for the *self-understanding* of those subjects who themselves participate in political struggles. In Mouffe, politics is divided dualistically into two realms. There is concrete politics, where hegemonic claims are made. This realm is conflictual, and its processes take place through a “struggle for recognition”. Then there is the realm of the observing theorist, who does not itself take part in the struggle for recognition. Instead, the external theorists just observe how the various “terms” such as “common good” become politically constructed within the various struggles. This agonistic democracy is possible only when most people continue to believe in something which, according to this theory, is actually impossible, a “necessary error”. I claim that my account does not have these paradoxical consequences. The rival parties are

not simply clashing and struggling for hegemony. They may also recognize each others as legitimate rivals who are continuously needed as rivals, because only their continuous presence makes the process itself democratically legitimate.

Conclusion: distrust as the basis for trust

In modern western democracies people are expected to trust a political system which consists of a government and a contradicting, distrusting opposition. Acting and decision-executing government ought to be controlled and checked by an alert opposition, in Hegelian words an Other. The Other provides a necessary “look from the outside” which cannot be disposed of in order for the political system to be considered democratic. According to my analysis Hegel’s theory of the dialectics between the self and the Other, presented in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, supports this idea. Through it, it can be argued that any government which produces particular decisions, based on specifically circumscribed arguments and rationale (as governments always necessarily and rightfully do, in order not to give room for arbitrary governing) constitutes a “particular universe”. Particular universes carry within them an aspect of particular political subjectivity, democratic checking of which cannot be left to the hands of disengaged external controllers, like judges or experts. Instead, internal controlling of those Others who are fully engaged and fully affected by the governments decisions, is necessary, in order for not only some specific aspects of government (falling under the expertise of for example juridical experts) to be scrutinized. In order for the various inter-related aspects of the acting governments actions to be critically evaluated “from the outside”, the political realm of the outside opposition should not be diminished. The central and seemingly widely acknowledged reason why the existence of an institutionalized opposition is considered as the base for the legitimacy of the political system is that democratic changes in the substantive *inside* of the government takes place through the distrusting criticism, coming from the *outside*. The criticism comes from those who are inside the democratic society yet not under the pressure to consent to or comply with the government’s rationale, because of a joint membership in the present synthesis (unity) of the government. In fact, it is considered the ultimate role, even a democratic and ethical duty, of the opposition to look at the government from a critical distance.

The idea that an institutionalized and internal conflict (carried by an institutionalized distrust embodied in the opposition) is the source of general good and ethical life is a novel development. It challenges most of the traditional political theories which considered conflict as a potentially dangerous defect, feared to lead into disorder or possibly even to a violent disintegration or fragmentation of the political body. The important idea in the internal conflict and its capacity to give legitimacy to the political system, lies in the fact that through the dialectics between the government and opposition, things concerning “all” (the present synthesis, unity or “substance” of the state, shown as positive laws, institutions, distribution of material resources and so forth) is in a constant democratic process and under critical ethical evaluation “from the internal outside”.

I have argued that an organized distrust, in the form of opposition, is the fundamental source of trust in democratic societies, and that this paradoxical unity of trust and distrust can be conceived in terms of the dialectics of Hegel’s early philosophy. Would this kind of view help us to understand any real-life political phenomena? Let me conclude this essay with an example. An example of a political community which is often said to suffer from a “democracy deficit” is the European Union. One possible reason why the EU is perceived as undemocratic is the absence of a recognized government-opposition dimension. The Commission is officially an “apolitical” government of technocrats, while in the European Parliament the majorities are built on issue-by-issue basis. While the Parliament is constituted in a democratic way – by free and equal elections – the lack of a responsible government *and* of an organized opposition which would channel the distrust is the main cause of the perceived “deficit”. According to my hypothesis, the low turnout in the elections of the Parliament and the increasing scepticism and even cynicism towards the Union itself reflects this problem. The Euro-citizens, in Finland for example, are not convinced that the power-holders within the Union have really deserved their power in a meaningful, democratically dialectical process. Without an opposition, this distrust may take a malign form.

References

Aristotle 1996. *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*. Ed. S. Everson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barker, E. 1942. *Reflections on Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barker, E. 1951. *Principles of Social & Political Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Benhabib, S. 1994. Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy. *Constellations* 1. 2652.

Cohen, J. 1989. Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy. In A. Hamlin and P. Pettit (eds.) *The Good Polity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1734.

Habermas, J. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Tr. W. Rehg, Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press

Hegel, G. W. F. 1974. Philosophien des Rechts nach der Vorlesungsnachschrift K. G. von Griesheims 1824/25. In K.-H. Ilting (ed.) *G.W.F. Hegel: Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818-1831*. Vol. 4. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1977. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [1807]

Hegel, G. W. F. 1967. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*,. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press [1821]

Locke, J. 1988. *Two Treatises of Government*. Ed. P. Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [1689]

Mouffe, C. 1993. *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. 2000. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. 2005. *On the Political*. London: Routledge.

Roman-Lagerspetz, S. 2009. *Striving for the Impossible. The Hegelian background of Judith Butler*. Acta Politica 16. Department of Political Science, University of Helsinki

Rosanvallon, P. 2006. *Democracy Past and Future*. Ed. S. Moyn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rousseau, J.-J. 1973. *The Social Contract and Discourses*. Ed. and tr. G. D. H. Cole. London: Dent.

Schmitt, C. 1985. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. Tr. E. Kennedy. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press. [1923]

Schmitt, C. 2008. *Constitutional Theory*. Tr. J. Seitzer. Durham (NC): Duke University Press.

[1928]

Schumpeter, J. 1962. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
[1942]

Urbinati, N. 2010. Unpolitical Democracy. *Political Theory* 38 (1): 65-92.

Weber, M. 1994. *Political Writings*. Tr. and ed. P. Lassman and R. Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Share this:

Share