Dewey's characterizations of democratic conduct show that he thinks of it as involving a give and take. One's contribution (according to ability) creates a claim (according to need). The individual has duty to his or her community (or society) and society has corresponding duties toward him or her. The mutual dependence of individual and society is the dynamic that generates values. Intellectual freedom, cultural and intellectual diversity, growth and participation are examples of central values made possible by the democratic dynamic. Democracy for Dewey is thus primary: It is an ideal because of the conditions for value formation that it creates. Other values are then (or can be) derived from the democratic ideal.

It is in this complex sense that Deweyan democracy is a "way of life." The claim is not that democracy is just one of many possible choices of a way to organize society or a way to live. It is in Dewey's view the only possible framework for the ever-increasing intricacies of the modern world.

There are two ways to explore the conception of democracy sketched here. One is a thorough exegesis of Dewey's works to investigate whether this characterization of his view makes sense – to check its correctness. Another is to look beyond Dewey and see whether the approach to democracy so inspired by his philosophy is a good approach to democratic theory, if the goal is to seek a useful justification of democracy. In this paper I am interested in doing the latter. In what follows I will attempt to show that "Deweyan democracy"—i.e. the idea of democracy as a way of life—offers interpretive possibilities that help understand how we can both have a substantive notion of democracy and put it in a justificatory framework where rejecting it is certainly possible, but fails to make sense unless, before rejecting it, one is prepared to accept it, in which case rejection, of course, does not make sense.

I

The democratic ideal—democracy as a way of life—looks like a moral concept. It has, obviously, a moral side to it in the sense of presenting a morally superior way of organizing

social life (to use Deweyan vocabulary) to other available ways of doing so. But it is a mistake to overemphasize this moral side of the concept (although a frequently to be seen in comments on Dewey's philosophy). The moral side in my view is less important than the epistemic side of Deweyan democracy. Democracy as a way of life provides the environment that protects and fosters science or, more generally, inquiry. The reason is proximity in method: In a democratic arrangement moral and political problems get a treatment similar or even analogous to what scientific method would dictate for inquiry. One must be careful not to take the analogy too far however. It does not mean that the method of science should be used to solve moral issues, but it is a recipe for moral cognitivism. Moral as well as political problems should be approached by reason and argument: Democracy is the intellectual environment that fosters reason and argument.

One should also follow Dewey in drawing a distinction between the idea of democracy and the manifestations of democracy (Dewey 1954, p. 143-144). The forms of power associated with democracy, such as representative government, majority rule, parliaments, elections etc. are no necessary features of democracy. Democracy is thus characterized by its ends rather than by the specific means that have traditionally been used to reach them.

Deweyan democracy has evoked considerable discussion in recent years. Many philosophers, who are generally sympathetic to Dewey, have been skeptical about his democratic theory and some have rejected it outright. Robert Talisse has argued that if democracy is a moral ideal it must be treated as other (possibly competing) ideals and values, from the point of view of value pluralism. Talisse correctly points out that from this perspective one cannot think of it as a shared or basic value, it would only amount to a moral value which could certainly be chosen or desired by any reasonable person, but could equally well be "reasonable rejected" by anyone adhering to different values (Talisse 2012, p. 109). For Talisse, Deweyan democracy fails the "pluralism test." He argues that Deweyan democracy is simply one version of perfectionism because of the emphasis on human flourishing that it entails. In other words, if we read Deweyan democracy from the point of view of a Rawlsian conception of liberalism, the democratic ideal turns out to be just one more "comprehensive doctrine" which can never serve as a basis for a political organization acceptable to all reasonable persons (Talisse 2012, p. 112-114).

Matthew Festenstein points out—contra Talisse—that the notion of reasonable rejectability

is not the kind of constraint that the pragmatist (i.e. the Deweyan) could accept. Since it only proposes a fixed standard to adopt or reject basic values it amounts to an a priori evaluation, which is not very useful from a pragmatist point of view. While Festenstein recognizes that one can reasonably reject the democratic ideal that, in his view, does not exclude it from being a possible "basis for the justification of state power." It is difficult to see, however, what is gained by his result, since relativizing the democratic ideal does not remove Talisse's objection, it only refocuses the difficulty (Festenstein 2010, p. 42).

Eric MacGilvray picks a useful element out of Deweyan democracy when he argues that it provides a kind of a test, similar to the pragmatic maxim, to determine whether one or another belief is fit for public discussion. It means that holding—and promoting—a belief about how to justify state power e.g., requires willingness to present it in experimental terms. The threshold for access to discussion about basic values for the social contract need in his view not be higher than that. If a belief can be tested and discussed experimentally—it would not have to be experimentally tested—and its meaning (conceivable consequences) for society can thus be assessed and discussed, there is no way to say that it is unfit for providing a justification of state power (MacGilvray 2004, p. 163-167; see also Festenstein 2010, p. 33). While MacGilvray provides a more interesting way of filtering issues fit for public (and political) discussion, his argument is no direct counterargument to Talisse's. He carves out a role for Deweyan democracy, i.e. to offer a framework for determining the democratic meaningfulness of beliefs. While I think this is an interesting and in fact very useful and practical way of using the idea of Deweyan democracy, it limits it to a methodological tool.

Other authors such as Elizabeth Anderson have praised Dewey's experimentalist account of democracy and yet other, such as Cheryl Misak, suggest that by using the more rigorous Peircean approach to inquiry as a model for understanding Deweyan democracy, one can exploit the inquiry/democracy analogy and apply methods of inquiry to the search for common solutions to social, political and even moral problems (Anderson 2006, p. 14-15; Misak 2000, see p. 45-47).

II

The question still remains whether and why Deweyan democracy should be chosen as an ideal, what kind of choice that would be, and what one has so chosen. I think this choice must be seen as a result of two related beliefs:

1. *Value articulation*: The choice of democracy as a way of life implies accepting the claim that democracy is a necessary condition for articulating central activities, goods and values in community such as freedom and equality, education, public discussion, openness and opportunity.
2. *Opportunity creation*: Democracy is a better way to create opportunities for inquiry, experimentation and in general solve problems using best available means and methods than other models of social organization.

If these beliefs can be sustained, one could see democracy as a prism through which certain values become articulated rather than itself a simple or core value. To reject democracy is therefore to refocus or rearrange social or moral values. If a democratic approach is not seen as basic, values such as the ones already mentioned, as well as many other central values of modern society such as pluralism, toleration and participation loose the meaning that democracy as a way of life gives them. Democracy thus should be chosen as “a way of life” in the sense of a principle of articulation and arrangement.

I depart from the authors I have mentioned in this paper since I want to show that the best argument for democracy comes neither from the independent standard that a Peircean model might create, nor from the experimentalist vision that it entails. The public action test does not per se provide an argument for democracy it only explains how we can make a useful distinction between issues that properly belong to public discussion and those that don’t. One might simply argue, of course, that there is no alternative. In a very practical way democracy is accepted as the only viable kind of social and political arrangement in modern society. The superficial acceptance of democracy does not mean that democracy is ideally practiced (or even practiced at all) in every case. It only reveals the dominance of the

discourse of democracy.

There are however alternatives to democracy, some of them quite powerful. Sometimes these alternatives are presented as the necessary basis of democracy and there are social forces that promote them as necessary restrictions of democracy, since without certain restrictions democracy could lead to undesirable results.

As Bo Rothstein has shown, the correlation between democracy and good life is not always in democracy's favor (Rothstein 2013, p. 15). Many surveys show it to be negative over a range of accepted indicators measuring quality of life. Good governance seems, on the other hand, to be strongly correlated to success in improving the lives of citizens, and increased democracy may lead to deterioration in governance. The alternative to democracy might thus be efficiency and justice in the design of institutions, as well as basic liberties that promote equality and individual freedom in accordance with liberal principles. It is clear in any case that if increased democracy is shown to go against improving the quality of life for citizens that indeed would deliver a strong argument against democracy.[1]

My contention is that by "choosing democracy" one is not choosing a particular method or procedure for a specific kind of decision-making but rather a general framework for public choice and deliberation. One could see such democratic commitment as a moral commitment. In such a case one would argue that the fairness of democratic approaches should commit one to them, even in cases when certain problems might seem better solved using a different approach. But the commitment is clearly epistemic as well: If there is an approach to problem solving best described as democratic to which one is committed, then one is also committed to the limitations of the approach. While Dewey seems not very keen on providing a moral justification for choosing democracy, he seriously attempts to provide an epistemic justification, i.e. argue that democracy will, in the long run, provide a better environment, better tools and on the whole better approaches to problem solving than other conceivable (or available) approaches.

From the Deweyan point of view the epistemic commitment must therefore be seen as prior to the moral commitment. It means that democracy should be seen as a way of dealing with and solving problems. It would not do to argue simply that democracy somehow ensures that the best methods are used or that solving problems democratically will always yield the

best solutions. What it does mean is to take seriously the duty to seek not only solutions that can be had by majority decision or solutions that can be forged by negotiation and compromise but to seek the best solutions. If “real” democracy often (even most of the time) falls short of the democratic ideal, this does not make the idea of democracy any less clear. Quite the contrary, since it is the idea by which political decisions should be elucidated and criticized.

III

In the last part of the paper I want to sketch how I think that the idea of *Deweyan democracy* should be used to discuss and judge political and administrative practice. The objective is on the one hand to see how democratic practice falls short of an ideal of democracy (or not), on the other to provide a healthy angle of democratic criticism. Dewey’s emphasis on experimentation in connection with democracy, i.e. seeing democracy as the free exchange and discussion of ideas where the point is to have a generation and selection process based on making full use of “intelligence” is key to understanding this conception of democracy (Dewey 1985, p. 362). This means that in democracy as a way of life, individual contribution to decision and policy-making is matched with (conceivable) individual influence on decisions and policy.

In addition to the two basic democratic beliefs—that it is a framework for value articulation and opportunity creation—one should think of two central conditions of democracy:

1. *The efficiency condition*: For each participating individual success does not necessarily entail being able to convince others of one’s point of view or being in the majority but on the efficiency of democratic process. Success is to be a part of a conclusion based on discussion, fact-finding, deliberation, debate and eventually (perhaps) voting that harvests the input of the participants.
2. *The integrity condition*: A decision made, or policy adopted, must be a result of what has been democratically concluded. If the logical space of decision-making is different

from the logical space of reason-giving, the procedure used is meaningless.

The efficiency condition deals with the ability of a group to come to a conclusion and the integrity condition with the relation between that conclusion and an eventual decision or action. Democratic failures may appear in both parts undermining either grounds for policies or legitimacy of decisions. The work of parliaments often evokes suspicion about the integrity of the democratic process when the connection between arguments and information revealed in deliberation and the eventual decision seems vague or absent; when positions are known in advance, more or less, and the debate carries only a symbolic function.

The give and take mentioned earlier need not be understood as individual willingness or commitment to participate in public debates or policy-making and therefore the efficiency condition does not depend on actual participation. Instead of seeking a standard to determine the content of public reason, one should seek a framework to connect participation and policy. The point should be access rather than inclusion, where the possibility of participating, not only in exercising free speech, but in actually providing input into policy, is at stake. The problem with participatory approaches taken by governments is often their reluctance to acknowledge the importance of public participation seeing it rather as a possible hurdle in successful governing. Therefore there is tendency to both limit the power of extra-institutional participation and place all kinds of security valves on the possible decisions to be reached by such extra-institutional participants. To illustrate this and at the same time probe the conditions of democracy and the basic democratic beliefs, I want to discuss four recent examples from Icelandic politics:

1. National assemblies 2009 and 2010
2. Annulment of the elections to the constitutional assembly 2011
3. The first Icesave referendum 2011
4. National referendum on the constitutional bill 2012

After the financial collapse in Iceland in 2008 there was considerable pressure on the

government to use unorthodox methods to change the course in Icelandic politics and promote democracy. The first attempt to create a public voice in order to influence policy systematically was made by an independent group of people who formed an NGO called "The Anthill". The Anthill organized a so-called National Assembly (Icel. *Þjóðfundur*) whose purpose was to articulate basic values and general policy goals for Icelandic society (Gunnar Hersveinn 2010). The National Assembly consisted of over one thousand people, a random sample from the general population, who were asked to participate in a meeting held in one day, 14 November 2009. The Anthill then planned to have the government accept the results of the assembly as guiding principles in the political renewal ahead.[2] Although it turned out to be problematic to simply adopt the results of the National Assembly and include them in the various tasks of the government, these results were taken seriously. The government adopted the methodology used in organizing National assemblies for public consultation regionally and nationally. In 2010 the Constitutional commission, whose task was to prepare for the Constitutional assembly, held a second National assembly elected in 2010 in order to revise or rewrite the Icelandic constitution.

There were several problems in the selection of participants for the National assemblies, which strictly speaking make it difficult to talk of participants as random samples of the population. Some other organizational problems have also reduced value of the results, but here I will focus on something else.

The task of the first National assembly was to articulate core values to guide governmental policy. The task of the second was to identify the core values to guide the revision of the constitution.[3] In both cases a number of general policy statements were also generated by participants to further identify policy goals. The problem with these results was their generality. The meetings neither provided priority rankings for goals nor any interpretation of value commitments and therefore policy-makers could hardly use them to plan policy. Therefore, even if the meetings were admirable exercises of public participation and engaged all kinds of people in thinking and talking about political issues—many had perhaps never been consulted except by occasional opinion polls—their overall usefulness was difficult to see. These meetings may have carried some meaning for participants who saw certain general value commitments articulated in a dramatic way as a result of the one-day meeting. They could however hardly have seen it as an opportunity for inquiry since the meeting was not deliberative. Its purpose was to express rather than critically engage the

views of the participants. The assembly also fails both the efficiency and the integrity condition. The lack of systematic discussion created a gap between whatever was said during the meeting and the results published after the meeting. No problem was dealt with during the meeting and therefore nothing can be said about efficiency in doing so. Worse since the results were overly vague, it was difficult to see how the integrity condition could be fulfilled either. The relation between these results and eventual decision-making could not be spelled out. From the perspective of Deweyan democracy one could then say that the meetings were democratically meaningless, since while it allowed symbolic participation, it could not effect policy- or decision-making in any meaningful way.

Elections to the Constitutional assembly were held 25 November 2010. A large number of candidates ran for a place in the assembly – 525 competed for 25 seats. The elections were unusual in many ways. The government was criticized during and after the elections for many flaws in how the elections were conducted. There were certain problems with the design of the ballot, the ballot boxes, the voting booths and some of the procedures used. After the elections a group of citizens complained to the Supreme Court who then reviewed the elections and found it to be flawed in six respects. Although the flaws were technical and gave no reason to conclude that the elections had been rigged or the vote misrepresented, the Supreme court used its authority to annul the elections.

One might argue that a decision, made by a judicial body such as the Supreme Court, should not be evaluated in terms of democracy since it is based on the law and on judicial authority. It was clear however, that having pointed out certain flaws in the way the elections were conducted, the Supreme Court had a choice to annul or not annul the elections. Since the results were not in dispute, the Court had no democratic reason to annul, i.e. doing so did not serve to ensure that the democratic will of the electorate was protected, in fact the will of the voters was in this respect not considered to be the most important issue. The decision was thus undemocratic and one could even argue that it was anti-democratic, or, in other words, an attempt to put an end to a democratic process, rather than facilitate it.

From the point of view of Deweyan democracy one should argue that the Supreme Court had a duty to point out the flaws in the elections but also to base its decision on a commitment to serve democracy. As was later pointed out by critics of the decision, it is not

in accordance with the rule of law that a judicial body may decide to annul a democratic election conducted legally, without significant failures and whose results clearly express the will of the electorate.[4] Here a commitment to democracy should have guided the Supreme Court. It is an epistemic commitment in the sense that the will of the people was known, it is also a moral commitment since serving democracy will then be seen as a more important value than technical perfection in the conduct of elections.

One of the bitterest issues debated in Iceland after the collapse of Iceland's international banks, was the so-called Icesave case. Landsbankinn, one of the three big banks that collapsed in October 2008, had in 2007 started individual savings accounts in Britain and Holland that were quite lucrative for private savers. When Landsbankinn's foreign operations were separated from its Icelandic operations and declared bankrupt, thousands of people lost their savings but were partially compensated by the British and Dutch governments in accordance with the European banking insurance policy. The British and the Dutch claimed that the Icelandic government was liable to pay the compensation and so they demanded to get back the amount paid to the individual savers. The Icelandic government to begin with accepted its responsibility and an agreement was negotiated. When the agreement was put to the parliament for ratification, a huge controversy ensued. Although the agreement was passed in the parliament it was clear that it created much anger among voters, who felt the Icelandic nation was being forced to pay debts created by irresponsible bank managers. The Icelandic president intervened by refusing to sign into law the bill on the agreement passed by the parliament, after having received petitions to do so from thousands of Icelandic citizens.

The Icelandic constitution stipulates that if the president refuses to sign a law, it must be put to a national referendum. As the referendum was being prepared, however, the government entered into new negotiations with the British and the Dutch. When the referendum on whether to accept the agreement passed by the parliament or reject it was conducted, the agreement was no longer relevant. It made therefore no difference whether the voters accepted or rejected the agreement since the government already had an offer that was clearly better for the Icelanders than the one they were voting on, even if not a formal signed offer or agreement. The referendum was therefore meaningless, and no democratic purpose in conducting it. One might argue that from some formalistic perspective it was unavoidable to conduct the referendum since it had already been

scheduled. Parliament could however also have revoked the bill. The question here should be what would be more democratic to hold the referendum or abandon it. From the perspective of Deweyan democracy a referendum that fails to give a meaningful result—whatever the result—is not democratic. Other approaches might yield positions such as that holding the referendum is harmless; anyone who fails to see the point in participating could refrain from doing so, and so on. But it seems to me that if there is no problem–solving purpose in holding the referendum, and the whole point of doing it has become secondary, i.e. declaring support for (or opposition to) the government it has lost its democratic legitimacy. Whatever purpose there may be in participating (or not participating) it is different from the question being voted on.

Finally I want to discuss the national referendum on the constitutional bill submitted by the Constitutional Council.[5] The bill was submitted in the summer of 2011 and was meant to be passed before the end of the term in the spring of 2013. In October 2012 a consultatory referendum was held on the bill and at the same time participants were asked to express their view on six key questions on the content of the new constitution. While expressing support or opposition to the bill itself was relatively straightforward and yielded clear results (around two thirds were in favor of the bill, 50% of the electorate participated), the questions were vague and the results therefore begged the question. I will not go into detail in describing the various questions or the problems the evoked. It will suffice to take one example. One of the questions had to do with the national church. Iceland has not taken the step to separate the national church from the state. The current Icelandic constitution says that the state must “support and protect” the Evangelical Lutheran Church.[6] The question in the referendum was whether the voter thought that the new constitution should have a clause dealing with the national church. It did not ask what (if anything) the voter thought the constitution should say about the National church. Since (to many people’s surprise) the result was that the majority wanted there to be something on the church in the constitution, it was unclear how to interpret the will of the voters in that respect.

Again, from the point of view of some democratic theories this flaw in the referendum might not be taken to mean that it was undemocratic, but from a Deweyan perspective one would be able to conclude that since the result was democratically meaningless the referendum did not fulfill the epistemic conditions of democracy. The answer to the question made problem-solving more, rather than less, difficult, and the referendum therefore was

meaningless for democratic problem solving.

Conclusion

Dewey's discussion of democracy and the framework referred to as Deweyan democracy makes sense of a democratic commitment according to which we can assess democratic initiatives and results from an epistemic and moral point of view. The epistemic commitment is prior to the moral commitment since in many cases the moral commitment is a result of the epistemic commitment. Once democracy as a way of life is understood in this context, there is no need to fear that a democratic commitment amounts to committing oneself to a comprehensive doctrine such as an ideology or a religious belief. It is simply to make demands not only about democratic procedure, participation or deliberation but also in regard to the results of democratic decision- and policy-making.

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Endnotes

1 The terms democracy and governance are sometimes conflated. In his introduction to a collection of papers on democracy, Giorgio Agamben maintains that “the word democracy is used in most cases to refer to a technique of governing” (Agamben 2011, p. 1). While it is probably true that the term democracy is often used inaccurately, the distinction between governance and democracy is quite clear. Agamben probably overstates the confusion. There is however a tendency to describe administrative restrictions of democracy as part of a democratic framework.

2 The website created for the 2009 National assembly only has information in Icelandic. See thjodfundur2009.is. In the Q and A section of the page it is stated that the goal of the assembly is to create “a strong common vision” for the nation which will help “solve difficult and complicated problems”. In another section the intention to present them to the government with, as well as to institutions and associations whose role it will be to contribute to the recovery of the country after the crisis.

3 The National assembly (also referred to as National forum and National gathering) is described on its website, also available in English. See http://www.thjodfundur2010.is/english/ n.d.)

4 Reynir Axelsson, Athugasemdir við ákvörðun Hæstaréttar um ógildingu kosningar til stjórnlagaþings. Published 23 February 2011 at stjornarskrarfelagid.is.

5 The Constitutional Council was appointed by parliament after the nullification of the elections to the Constitutional Assembly. All 25 elected Assembly members were appointed

except on who decided not to participate in the appointed body.

6 Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, Article 62. See: http://www.government.is/constitution/.

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