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The Idea of Democracy and Its Distortions: From Socrates to Cornel West

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Abstract

Democracy is a highly-cherished idea nowadays as it casts an aura of legitimacy and prestige on political systems, theories, and ideologies. This is why regimes, political organizations, theories, and ideologies of all types lay claim to being democratic or aiming to serve its interests. To justify their claims and aims, they all define democracy in ways that suit their interests and fit their purposes. Some examples: ideologues of capitalism define democracy in ways that serve the interests of the free-market system and endorse the rule of capital, hence liberal democracy; economists formulate it so that it fits within the conceptual framework of their discipline; and Cornel West defines it as a tragicomic concept that suits his Christian vision. These attempts at making democracy fit one's interests, purposes, and views have distorted the true practice and meaning of the idea, and have subverted its normative substance. Putting its focus mainly on examining Cornel West's Democracy Matters (Penguin Press, 2004) as one of the latest misrepresentations and distortions of the idea of democracy, this essay argues that we need to revisit the original meaning of the concept (the "rule by the people"), and revive the contention that democracy entails the citizens' direct, deliberative, and ongoing participation and power in politics. To counter the economists' and liberal democracy's gutting of the normative substance of democracy, and also to counter West's distorted vision of it, the essay attempts to retrieve the authentic content of democracy, and puts forth a positive vision for its future.

Keywords

Athenian Democracy, Liberal Democracy, American Democracy, Direct Democracy, Participatory Democracy, Deliberative Democracy, Socrates, Cornel West

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The Idea of Democracy: Past and Present

Of all the ideas and concepts that we have inherited from ancient Greece, democracy is probably the one that has suffered the most distortions and deformations. In its original formulation in Athens, democracy meant "rule by the people." The concept itself and the form of governing that was associated with it can be said to have been established on three essentially-normative social-political principles or *moral ideals*: the citizens' *direct* and *ongoing* participation in the political process, especially in the legislative and policy decision-making; citizens' direct and ongoing engagement in public deliberations; and finally, a substantive notion of equality among those who were fortunate enough to have the honor of being regarded as citizens of Athens.

The underlying assumption that accompanied the idea in its original manifestation in Athens was the belief that *polis* stood for a set of values which defined the community of its people, and represented their common good, and that the "rule by the people" was not only a way of upholding and protecting these values, but itself was one of them. Democracy rose to prominence in Athens as a consequence of the *demos*' struggle for further equality. The struggle helped *demos* to work their way into the city's political system. As a result, the aristocrats of the city were forced to share the political power with the general public. Aristocrats and almost all of the intellectual elites of the time resented democracy and did all they could to manipulate and sabotage it—and they finally succeeded. The aristocrats of the city and their intellectual entourage were of the view that the *demos* lacked the intelligence, knowledge, and moral qualifications needed for ruling. For them, ruling was the rightful business of aristocrats and learned men who either were from aristocratic lineage or saw the world through their eyes.

It was for this reason that democracy in ancient Athens was considered by the aristocratic class and its intellectual elites, as C. B. Macpherson once put it, a "bad word." Macpherson teaches us that for almost twenty-four centuries, democracy lived with this stigma. Almost all of the learned and great men in the history of Western civilization looked upon the idea of "rule by the people" with disdain. This attitude continued until the latter part of the19th and the early decades of the 20th centuries, when democracy almost suddenly resurfaced as a "good word" among the ruling classes. By the time President Woodrow Wilson declared in 1917 that "the world must be made safe for democracy," democracy had become an important "buzzword" for the men of wealth, power, and letters. The rehabilitation of democracy as a good thing, especially in the period spanning the 1860s through the 1930s was due to the fact that the aristocrats of the time in Western Europe and North America (i.e., the propertied classes ranging from old-moneyed interests to those owning new industrial firms)—and their shrewd politicians and intellectuals—discovered in democracy a magical power that could help thwart widespread social unrests and revolutions, and, even better, could cast an aura of legitimacy on the rule of capital and the dominance of market forces. This was the beginning of the birth of what nowadays we refer to as "liberal democracy." (See Macpherson 1965; 1977.)

Democracy's resurgence as a good word or a good thing, and hence the birth of liberal democracy, came at a hefty cost to the actual idea and practice of democracy. In the process, the very meaning of the original idea was mutilated under a wave of distortions which eventually transformed the existing practice of "democracy" into a primarily *anormative*, *purely political*, and fundamentally elitist and technocratic idea (John Stuart Mill, 1861; Behrouzi, 2005a, 108-10). Democracy now meant a representative system of governance that was headed by elected officials who ruled over the people in the name of ruling on their behalf. In the process, the moral content of the original conception—that is to say, the idea that people

ought to be the masters of their lives, or that they ought to do the decision-making on laws under which they have to live—was gutted. The core principles of the citizens' *direct*, *ongoing*, and *deliberative* participation in political discussions and decision-makings were supplanted by the liberal-democratic principles of representative government, universal suffrage, periodic elections, and procedural decision-making in the elected assemblies. Finally, the principle of *substantive* equality was replaced by an essentially formal-legal principle that manifests itself mainly in the principles of one person, one vote, and the equality of all before the law.

Thus, the so-called "liberal democracy" began on shaky philosophical grounds. Yet, it managed to survive the challenge of fascism and emerged victorious at the end of World War II. In the triumphalist and prosperous post-war years, especially in 1950s America when corporate executives were worshiped as national heroes and the business world seemed to have all the answers to all of the societal problems, some economists turned their attention to democracy. This marked the beginning of a second wave of distortions aimed at democracy—which continues to this day. Actually, the wave was initiated by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942 and soon other economists joined the venture. In his seminal work, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Schumpeter took the distortions of the first wave—that democracy was an anormative, purely political, expertise-based, and elitist system of governance—as his point of departure, and added two new distortions of his own.

First, Schumpeter rejected the notion that democracy had anything to do with the idea of the "common good." Second, he posited democracy as a mere "*method*" or a *technique* for selecting the officials of the representative government which, he argued, worked in accordance with the laws of free market economics, or as he put it, "by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." While the first distortionist wave still gave lip service to the idea of the "common good," the Schumpeterian distortion branded the idea as a mere "myth," and more importantly, postulated democracy as the politics of conflicting interests and competition for votes played by elites vying for power (Schumpeter, 1942, 250-83; Behrouzi, 2005a, 119-35). This way of presenting democracy had a great impact on social and political scientists who soon began to focus on empirical investigations of how voters actually vote or how candidates for office compete with each other and strategize to win elections. They also began to develop theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools for studying voters' behaviors, candidates' competitions for votes, and power-sharing once they win elections and arrive in the office. Concepts and terms such as "pluralism," "interest groups," "voting blocks," "pluralist democracy," and "polyarchy" came out of these developments—the totality of which is now referred to as the "scientific" study of politics, i.e., "behaviorism".

The analogy Schumpeter drew between the workings of democracy and free-market economy opened the floodgates for a much larger carnage than social scientists could do on their own. The welfare economists went to work to develop economic models for the behaviors of political parties, politicians, and voters as economic agents, all being regarded as inherently self-serving and rational utility-maximizers—works of Anthony Downs are good examples here. It was not long before economists moved to take full ownership of the concept as they dragged it down to the level of an economic conception.

In the hands of economists, democracy was no longer treated as a moral social-political idea, or even a political system of governance for the common good, as the first distortionist wave still acknowledged in tacit ways, but an enterprise that worked with the laws of the free markets and dealt with the selfish interests of beings who by nature were calculating and self-interested. In the hands of a discipline whose theoretical framework and conceptual tools are primarily developed for the purpose of approaching the

world from the standpoints of cost-benefit and equilibrium analyses, democracy suffered a complete make-over, as whatever normative content in it had survived the first wave of distortions, was beaten out of it. The notion of the "citizen" was stripped of its normative social-political attributes (such as social responsibilities and civic virtues) and was turned into an economic rational-instrumental agent and a utility maximizer who behaves more like a consumer or a share-holder than a social and moral agent. Political "wills of citizens" were postulated as "preferences of individuals." The concept of "consumer sovereignty" rose to counter and supplant the old idea of people's sovereignty.

The social choice, public choice, and rational choice theorists showed off their mathematical pyrotechnics as they deformed democracy further and further so that it eventually fit their own quantitative-analytical frameworks—the crown jewel of their achievements being Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem, which supposedly proved the impossibility of democracy. Taking turns in beating on the idea with the hammer of the discipline's language and world-outlook nowadays seems to be a part of the rite of passage to greatness in economics, or as something that the famed ones ought to do as they feel compelled to write or comment on democracy. From Schumpeter to Friedman, this seems to be the pattern.

The economists are not the only culprits in the second distortionist assault on democracy. Others, including a wide range of social scientists, philosophers, journalists, and a whole host of other powerful intellectual and political forces have done their share of contributions to the dragging of a moral idea down to the level of cost-benefit calculations. It is largely because of these distortionist efforts that democracy is now widely understood in a symbiotic relation to free-markets. Nowadays, the terms "democracy" and "free markets" appear so often together that the coupling instills in the minds of the people the false consciousness that democracy and free-markets are conceptually inseparable and internally connected, and that they "go together"; or, that there cannot be free elections or democracy without free-markets; and finally, that democracy and free-markets share the common principle of the "freedom of choice" at their very core. The mangling of the concept of democracy through collapsing it into the concept of freedom—and seeing it as a sub-category of freedom—has proven so successful that, for most people nowadays, democracy is understood mainly as a system of governing in which people have the freedom to choose their government. This erroneous view is so commonplace that most people would find it difficult to believe that democracy essentially and conceptually has nothing to do with free-markets, or that democracy is substantively a much broader concept than the idea of giving to people the "freedom of choice" in politics or giving them the "right to choose" their government.

In the prevailing political and intellectual climate, it would also be equally difficult for most people to overcome the damages of the first distortionist wave. That is to say, to come to the realization that democracy is not merely a political system of government based on representation, universal suffrage, and periodic elections, but is essentially a *moral* idea, and a much broader and deeper social-political conception, which is about empowering citizens to participate in decision-making—in *actual*, *direct,* and *ongoing* ways—on agendas, priorities, policies, and legislative matters that affect their lives in profound ways.

Cornel West's Idea of Democracy

It is against this theoretical background and history of the true meaning of "democracy" that I read Cornel West's *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). I see a professor of religion and a lover of tragicomic literature and art taking his turn with the idea of democracy and subjecting it to yet another form of distortion, this one being religious-literary in nature. As I see it, Cornel West's intention in the book is to reinterpret and reformulate the much tortured and

mutilated idea of democracy through his notion of a "prophetic legacy of Jerusalem" and the tragicomic-romantic concept of a “dark hope” which he thinks would help deliver our society from various evils.

West begins by arguing that American democracy is plagued by three nihilistic dogmas: the dogma of "market-fundamentalism" (the corporate-dominated political and economic system and its effects on popular culture: materialism, consumerism, and the worship of wealth and greed); the dogma of "aggressive militarism" (imperial motives and the preemptive strike doctrine being extensions of it); and the dogma of "escalating authoritarianism," the Patriot Act being one of its manifestations (West, 2004, 3-8).

To counter these dogmas, and “deepen” American democracy, West contends that we need to revive “three crucial traditions,” which he believes could help “fuel deep democratic energies” in the country. (West, 2004, 16) The first is “the Greek tradition of Socratic commitment to questioning—questioning of ourselves, of authority, of dogmas…” Here, West has the Athenian democracy in mind, and Socrates is its towering figure. The second tradition is “the Jewish invention of the prophetic commitment to justice,” which West believes, is also embraced by Christianity and Islam. The prophetic legacy of Jerusalem represents this tradition, and Jesus Christ occupies the most prominent place in it. Finally, the third is the tradition of the “tragicomic commitment to hope…the ability to laugh and retain a sense of life’s joy…to preserve hope…as against falling into the nihilism of paralyzing despair.” This is the tradition of the African-Americans’ struggle for freedom (both political struggles and contributions to the black liberation movement in the arts and literature). Martin Luther King, Jr. and “the blues” are the most prominent representatives of this tradition. West believes that the “essence” of the blues is “to stare painful truths in the face and preserve without cynicism or pessimism,” and that is why it deserves a prominent place in this tradition (West, 2004, 21). To these three traditions, West also adds the American tradition of “imaginative self-creation,” which he believes is best represented by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison.

West’s aim in *Democracy Matters* is “to put forward a strong democratic vision and critique, rooted in a deep democratic tradition forged on the nightside of precious American democratic experiment—a tradition of Socratic examination, prophetic practice, and dark hope." (West, 2004, 61-62) He hopes that we can counter, and eventually defeat, the three dogmas by reviving these traditions. His strategy is to spread this vision, and instill in the minds of the readers, and hopefully in the minds of everyone else in the country, the values and cultural attitudes this tradition nurtures and upholds. West believes that these attitudes and values are not just moral, but for the most part religious in content and character. He argues that reviving them will help expand social justice and democracy. Throughout the book, West portrays Socrates, Jesus, and King as the embodiments of these values and attitudes, and presents them to us, especially Socrates, as democratic role models to be emulated. He also exalts tragicomic literature, jazz, and blues as important components of the democratic culture he hopes to spawn.

While I agree with West that market-fundamentalism, aggressive militarism, and authoritarianism undermine democracy, and see the need, as he does, for major political and cultural changes in the country, I take issue with both his understanding of democracy and his strategy. My main problem with West is that he takes, as his point of departure, the first distortionist conception of democracy as representing what democracy really is, and by doing so, he lends legitimacy to a flawed conception of governance that lies at the root of our pseudo-democracy. Taking the really-existing democracy as what democracy really is, West’s intention is to make contributions toward remedying its problems. However, his work toward this end amounts to proposing a new way of looking at democracy which, I will argue, is yet another way of distorting the true meaning of democracy.

As to some of my other problems with West, I will also argue that advocating social justice and democracy mainly on religious grounds, or urging citizens to become like Socrates and Jesus, will not bring about a genuine democracy. Resisting authoritarianism at home, and aggressive militarism abroad, will not do it either. The best these endeavors can accomplish is to help smooth out the rough edges of our distorted form of democracy, and keep its ugly extremities in check. No doubt, they can make our present form of government more responsive to the needs of the citizens, and more just toward minorities. They can also make our political officials less authoritarian, and less belligerent or aggressive at home and abroad. But what they cannot do is to give us a genuine democracy.

To expand on these assertions, and their relevance to my critique of *Democracy Matters*, I will start with identifying three main features of West's understanding of democracy, which go to the root of all that is problematic in *Democracy Matters*.

To begin with, West never defines what he means by democracy, and for this reason, the book appears fundamentally incoherent when read carefully. However, by many indications, it seems that what West takes as democracy is the common misunderstanding of the concept, which is but the first distortionist model, usually referred to as liberal-democracy. That is to say, democracy is a *political* system of governance with a *representative* form of government based on a constitution—(containing some fundamentals such as the rule of law, the guarantees of individual rights and liberties, formal equalities, a system of checks and balances, and the separation of powers)—and the principles of the accountability of the government (the elected elites) to the electorate, and the sovereignty of the people enforced through periodic elections. Such a system of governance, West seems to believe, constitutes a democracy. Furthermore, he is of the view that such a system is a good form of government, provided that: (1) it is devoted to the cause of justice (primarily understood in the sense of decreasing socio-economic inequalities among its citizens) and pursues fair policies at home and abroad; (2) it avoids the traps of falling into authoritarianism and behaving oppressively in dealing with its racial, ethnic, and religious minorities at home, and militarism abroad.

The second feature of West's understanding of democracy is that it appears unacquainted with the contemporary literature on the democratic theory and alternative approaches that have been out there since the 1960s. The idea of "participatory democracy," and the new ideas that have sprung from it, e.g., "direct democracy," "deliberative democracy," "teledemocracy," and "e-democracy"—that are now present in most of the contemporary discussions of democracy—are completely absent in *Democracy Matters*.

Finally the third feature. Given that West shows no awareness of, or interest in, alternative ways of thinking about democracy (the second feature), he is limited to working within the confines of the first distortionist conception and finding ways of making the pseudo-democracy work. What he does toward this end is to give his own twist to the first distortionist model, something which might look minute, but has major implications as far as his contribution to solving the problems of American democracy is concerned. The following passage goes to the heart of what West takes democracy to be.

> *Democracy is always a movement of an energized public to make elites responsible*—it is at its core and most basic foundation the taking back of one's power in the face of the misuse of elite power. In this sense, democracy is more a verb than a noun—it is more a dynamic striving and collective movement than a static order or stationary status quo. Democracy is not just a system of governance, as we tend to think of it, but a *cultural* way of being. This is where the voices of our great democratic truth tellers come in. (West, 68, italics added)

West is very clear here. He does not regard democracy primarily as a system of governance *by the people*, to begin with, or even as a system of governance *per se* (even though it appears as if he is saying the opposite by the phrase "is not just a system of governance"), but primarily as a *protest movement of the people on the outside against the government*. At the root of this way of thinking about democracy lies the elitist assumptions of the first distortionist conception that takes ruling to be the business of the expert-technocratic elites, and ignores the role of the people in the government in democracy. West's own brand of distortion begins with locating the domain of democracy and the people's participation in politics outside of the government.

If the people's input in democracy in the first distortionist model is understood in terms of their indirect contributions to the process within the system (i.e., in terms of influencing the process and the elites through voting in periodic elections, making campaign contributions, and lobbying the representatives), in West's conception, the domain of the people's indirect contribution is moved to *without*. Democracy is the "movement of an energized public" pouring into the streets from time to time, or the movement of the people, as individuals, who tell the truth bluntly or protest the establishment through their literary or artistic works *in order to render the government accountable, and rein in the elites*.

This feature of West's understanding of democracy comes through vividly in his examination of the experience of Athenian democracy. In considering this experience, West completely misses out on the fundamental idea and the foundational principles at the core of Athenian democracy—viz., ruling is the rightful business of the people, and that the people govern themselves through participating in almost all levels of the *polis* in a *direct* and *ongoing* manner. Instead, he presents to us an anti-democratic individual like Socrates as the "towering figure" of Athenian democracy, and portrays him as representing the essence of what this democracy was all about. West shrinks the whole experience of Athenian democracy to the "Greek creation of the Socratic commitment to questioning." (West, 16, 208-09, 218) Somehow, it does not seem to occur to West that people themselves could be in the government and could do the ruling themselves—as the Athenian citizens once did—or that they, at least, could do the most essential part of the ruling, viz., the decision-making part. And if they cannot do all of this by themselves, they could do some of it, or at the very least, they could contribute to the process directly, or be part of it. Excluding people from governance in democracy, and reducing their role to mere truth-tellers or protesters on the *outside*, completely subverts the very meaning of democracy, and what a democratic system of governance is all about.

Once we get to see the main features of West's understanding of democracy, the rest of the elements of his conception fall in place. If the first distortion of the idea of democracy in the modern world transformed it from a primarily moral social-political concept into a mainly value-free and purely political system, and if the economists distorted it through presenting it as an economic category subjected to the laws of free-market economy, West wants us to see it as primarily a *cultural concept*, and more precisely, as the culture of protesting the government, opposing the authority, and telling the truth. Once democracy is planted squarely in the domain of culture, it would then follow that democracy be regarded as an *individual affair*. That is to say, in order to expand or sustain democracy, we as individuals would need to develop, and help flourish, a democratic type of mores and attitudes. In other words, as individuals, we would need to develop "democratic individuality" traits and values including self-reliance, justice, compassion, and spirit.

The Emersonians, “Democratic Individuality,” and Origins of American Democracy

In making sense of why West posits democracy as a cultural concept and prescribes developing the “democratic individuality” as the solution to the problem of democracy, one needs to ponder the following questions. Why does West see democracy as an individual affair, and consequently, puts the whole burden of developing and sustaining this ideal democratic culture on the shoulders of the individual citizens? Also, why doesn't he think that social, economic, and state institutions could share some of this burden?

The answers to these questions lie in West's fascination with the Emersonians (especially with Ralph Waldo Emerson himself and Walt Whitman), and also with their romantic understanding of the notion of "democratic individuality," which they idealized as a perfect, moral, and transcendental type of individuality that complemented their own transcendental and spiritualized idea of democracy. (West, 67-77) West's enthusiastic espousal of the Emersonian concept of "democratic individuality" shapes his understanding of democracy in important ways, and hence deserves a bit of discussion here.

In doing so, one needs to bear in mind the following. First, the works of Emerson and Whitman, including their reflections on, or references to, democracy, are literary in nature, and at best should be seen as works of social and cultural criticism rather than as writings that can properly be called political philosophy or political theory. (Marx, 1990, 596) Second, the concept of "democratic individuality" has a religious, in particular a Puritan, dimension which often manifests itself in a high-minded, enlightened, and pious form of Puritanism, especially in Emerson. (Marx, 1990, 598) Third, the concept has its own historical dimensions in that it was intertwined with the conceptions of individuality and democracy that were prevalent in the heyday of the unbridled free-market capitalism of 19th century America, especially in the post-Civil War period.

As to the conception of individuality itself in that period, rejecting conventions and hierarchies, and freeing oneself from the limitations they imposed, and also having entrepreneurial and going-it-alone attitudes were considered by many, especially the wealthy and middle classes, as highly cherished virtues. Moreover, this conception of individuality, as well as its connections to the market economy and wealth, had deeper philosophical roots that tied it to the "negative" conception of "freedom" which went all the way back to the founding of America in the earlier century. In this negative conception, freedom is understood as the absence of coercion, or in particular, the absence of governmental interferences with individuals' affairs. For the men of wealth and power who led the American Revolution and wrote the Constitution, this generally meant freedom from government's interferences with one's ability to acquire property, or manage and dispose of it as one pleases.

It was this conception of individuality that the Emersonians took as their raw material. The "democratic" qualification that they added to it has to do with their intellectualization, spiritualization, and moralization of this idea. That is to say, for them, this freedom, or the individuality which stems from it, was not just an external freedom from restrictions out there in the social, economic, and political world—which they refused to conform to its materialistic norms on high-minded moral grounds—but also had an intellectual and spiritual dimension, i.e., it also meant freedom from inner vices such as ignorance, conformity, and superficiality. This in part explains the religious dimension of the Emersonian "democratic individuality.” Possessing democratic individuality for the Emersonians, on the one hand, meant that the individual was free from the inner limitations of his mind and spirit, which prevented him from thinking for himself and being self-reliant, and also held him back from developing his intellectual-artistic-spiritual powers, and from being an intellectual and spiritual force in the world.

On the other hand, it meant that a democratic individual would be socially aware and responsible, which in part meant being thoughtful, receptive, and responsive to the views and needs of others. It also meant that the democratic individual was able to conquer his selfishness, envy, and avarice, and educate himself on moral matters, and hence become a just and courageous person and, as a result, be able to resist unjust practices and institutions, or take action on behalf of those who suffered injustice. (This in part helps explain the Emersonians' vehement opposition to slavery in the U.S. and their efforts to popularize abolitionist sentiments.) In short, having "democratic individuality" meant that the individual could become an intellectual-spiritual force and a moral agent in the world.

Although this sounds all well and good, and no one with good moral conscience—except ethical egoists— could take issue with having this type of individuality, something is not quite right with it. In particular, one wonders why we should call this individuality a "democratic" individuality. Where is the part played by the predicate "democratic" in this individuality? What does this have to do with the idea of democracy which literally means "rule by the people"? The answers to these questions lie in the fact that the conception of democracy that prevailed in the America of the time had been developed *not* out of the original idea of democracy itself, but out of the negative conception of freedom which has no conceptual or logical connections to the idea of democracy. (See Berlin, 1969, e.g., 130.)

Briefly stated, the men of wealth, power, and letters in 19th century America, as well as those of the earlier generations, including the framers of the Constitution and members of the First Congress, first and foremost had privileged freedom (in its "negative" sense) in general, and freedom of property in particular, as the most fundamental political value. This privileging of negative freedoms had manifested itself in the form of affirming, and protecting, the legal entitlements and the rights of citizens. Out of this came the rise, and the eventual entrenchment, of rights-based conceptions of citizenship, politics, and social and economic relations in American political thought. The affirming of negative freedoms went hand in hand with displaying hostility toward the idea of democracy by American political elites, including the Founding Fathers. As late as 1799, the words "democracy" and "democrat" were regarded as "smear-words" in the American political lexicon, and one only used them to discredit or reproach his political opponents—in somewhat similar to the way the words "communism" and "communist" were used during the Cold War era. (Palmer, 1953, 207, 223)

Within the theoretical-conceptual framework of American political thought, the idea of democracy could only be accepted—and introduced—in terms of the rights of citizens. Hence becoming democratic or expanding democracy could only be understood—and introduced—in the form of expanding the legal entitlements of the individuals in the political system or expanding voting rights to those (white males) who were shut out of the system for lacking the required minimum amount of property.

Starting in the early 19th century, when the fortunes of the small farmers and the property-less middle-class artisans and entrepreneurs were rising, the words "democracy" and "democratic" gradually began to take somewhat of a foothold, as they were increasingly being used to call attention to the entitlements of the rising middle-classes to some shares in the political power, especially in the state legislatures. (The interests and views of these classes, which were represented by the Anti-Federalist mold of thinking in the debates circa the ratification of the American Constitution, had been defeated at the hands of the Federalists who represented the interests of the wealthy.) The rise of the phenomenon of "Jacksonian Democracy" in the early 1830s, and its ripple effect on the rest of the century, is to be understood in this context, as the country attempted to extend the voting rights to the well-paid and well-off workers and growing middle-class professionals who did not meet the property qualifications required for eligibility to vote at the time. Because of the tensions that had been created as the result of the

expansion of industry and growing immigration, there was a need to expand the mass base of support for the system by wooing those white males who did not meet the voting eligibility criterion. Hence, in order to ease tensions, and create a popular image for itself, the system gradually gave in to the demands of the middle-classes by relaxing or removing the property qualifications.

Against this backdrop, I am inclined to see the efforts of the Emersonians and like-minded intellectuals of the time as a noble endeavor to give moral substance and political-cultural value, and hence "democratic content," to the shallow and formal voting rights that were being granted to white men who came from humble backgrounds. For Emersonians, the spread of value-free rights, freedoms, or individualisms could only help spread the vulgar and crass materialism of the wealthy and established middle-classes of the time, and hence could pose a danger to the country. It seems to me that the Emersonians read something sacred into the meaning of democracy or saw it as the best or the only hope for a crudely materialistic country, which had achieved so much in the way of wealth, but lacked appreciation for spiritual, intellectual, and moral matters. This way of looking at the question can help explain why the Emersonians romanticized democracy into an idea that represented a higher, i.e., intellectual, spiritual, and moral form of social existence. Their conception of democracy is but the spiritualization and moralization of the rights-based understanding of democracy that was—and still is—prevalent in America. As I see it, the Emersonians' conception of "democratic individuality" was intended to supplement the rights-based understanding of democracy with the moral, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions that they thought it was lacking.

In the Emersonian cast of mind, for democracy to take root, "democratic individuality" or "Personalism" (Whitman's term)—and hence this intellectual, moral, and spiritual understanding of freedom and rights—needed to be universalized into a form of culture. This would mean that intellectuals of the caliber of Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau would be burdened with the responsibility of forging a new political culture and helping to popularize it. People needed to be educated and taught to think for themselves and trust their own thoughts. (This way of seeing "democratic individuality" could also help us understand the Emersonians' intellectual connections to the Enlightenment and their romanticism and moral idealism.) Once we manage to develop democratic individuality among the people, and once the democratic culture that comes with it gathers adequate strength, the other two spheres of society, viz., the state and the economy, would have no choice but to reform themselves accordingly in order to adjust to the new culture.

Here one needs to keep in mind another aspect of the historical dimensions of the Emersonian project. In 19th century America, the socio-economic relations and institutions of the monopolistic industrial capitalism, including the monolithic culture industry which we now have, had not been developed adequately. For this reason, it was possible for non-conformist and progressive intellectuals such as Emerson to exert considerable influence on the culture, at least among those who were literate, through traveling the country and giving lectures. And this, in part, could explain the Emersonians' romantic belief that they could help foster a democratic culture, and hence bring about a democratic society, through enlightening the people.

West's fascination with the Emersonians' notion of "democratic individuality" and with their romanticism and idealism seems to be the reason why he proposes a cultural solution to the persistent problem of "democracy" in America. This also could explain why he does not see a role for the state or the economy insofar as the question of expanding democracy is concerned. Moreover, this could also help us understand West's predilection for seeing democracy as an individual affair. In following in the footsteps of the Emersonians, West also takes as his point of departure the prevailing individual-rights-

based conception of democracy. In our day, the rights-based understanding manifests itself as liberal democracy, which is the first distortionist conception of democracy. Finally, working within the confines of the Emersonian mindset, and parallel to the Emersonian project, West also wants to help overcome the deficiencies of the rights-based democracy of *our* time by supplementing it with the moral, intellectual, and spiritual elements that it lacks.

Cornel West, Democracy, and the Christian History of the United States

Now, where would the values and traits that West thinks would help us develop a democratic individuality come from? In answering this question, one does not need to dig deep. West is loud and clear. He is of the view that an enlightened Christianity is the source of the values we would need to develop the personal traits needed for "democratic individuality." West's commitment to Christianity runs much deeper than his commitment to democracy. As he himself puts it, "I speak as a Christian—one whose commitment to democracy is very deep but whose Christian convictions are even deeper." (West, 171) This is why he wants to put what he calls "prophetic Christianity" at the heart of the democratic culture he wants to spawn.

As West sees it, in the American context, this Christianity has its own distinctive flavor. Namely, it is the Christianity that has evolved in the context of the African-Americans' four hundred years of struggle for justice and equality that came to a head in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. As far as this history goes, on the one hand, we have the non-violent political struggles of the 1950s and 1960s in the form of protests in the streets, civil disobedience, and eloquent speeches by Civil Rights leaders addressed to the white American establishment demanding that America live up to the values it preached. On the other hand, we have an older history of struggle that goes back to the time when the abolitionist movement began to take shape, and white intellectuals-moralists (e.g., Emerson), established black intellectuals (e.g., Fredrick Douglas), and more importantly, black musicians, artists, and writers began to challenge the immorality and injustice of slavery in their arts and literature.

West looks at this history of struggle through his Christian eyes, and whenever his eyes fail him, he puts on his dark-tragicomic glasses to see the profound sorrows of blacks and the images of their tortured, yet spirited and lively souls, especially those depicted by musicians and artists who fought the injustice of racial oppression in their works, and kept the "dark hope" alive. Here we have West's fascination with blues, Jazz, and black literature and art in general, and his love for Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Tupac Shakur in particular. West is absolutely convinced that it was Christians who led the Civil Rights movement to victory. He is also convinced that the older tradition of the blacks' struggle for justice had Christian roots or contexts as well. And when it happens that he runs into individuals or movements that would not quite fit his Christian or dark-tragicomic image of this history, he finds a way of bringing them into the fold by linking them to Christianity, or putting them in the Christian context somehow.

West does not stop just at Christianizing the history of the African-Americans' struggle; he seems to be intent on extending it to the whole of the history of democratic movements in the United States. And, if it happens that there are political activists, revolutionaries, artistic-literary figures, or leaders of movements seeking justice or empowerment of the people who cannot be put in his Christian-tragicomic mold, or cannot be turned into prophets or saints of some kind in the prophetic legacy of Jerusalem, they are simply ignored. Here are some examples. The socialist Eugene Debs gets a mention as an example of someone whose struggle against the inequality of wealth in the U.S. could be likened to a "crusade". Other non-Christian political activists and writers such as Upton Sinclair and Emma Goldman are ignored. The same is true of the intense and bloody struggles around the formation of labor unions and

their demands for union rights and their struggle for political power and economic justice. Similarly, the struggles for women's liberation or the contributions of anarchists, socialists, and communists, not just to the workers' struggle, but also to the racial justice and the Civil Rights movement are not included. References to the struggles of the Wobbliest and the founders of the AFL and CIO are not there. It would not be unfair to say that West's Christianizing of the history of the struggle for justice and democracy in the U.S. amounts to a gross miscarriage of justice to this history.

West, Socrates, Jesus, and Democracy

West's Christian reading of American history is closely tied to his penchant for shaping his democratic culture in the context of prophetic Christianity and its particular manifestation in the tragicomic scene of the African-American experience. Yet, West is not quite content with this context, as he feels the need to find a way to embolden people and encourage them to get into the habit of standing up to the government and questioning the wisdom and morality of its leaders and their rule. However, there is a problem here, which West is clearly aware of, but does not acknowledge. That is, there is no historical evidence to show that the originator of Christianity himself preached or practiced what West preaches to us here. Jesus did turn the table on the money changers in the temple, but never directly challenged, at least in political terms, the authority of the occupying Romans and the Jewish pharisaic collaborators who served them. To remedy this shortcoming, West turns to Socrates who is widely recognized as the ultimate champion of critical thinking and courageous questioning in the history of the Western civilization.

However, West cannot introduce Socrates to us as a role model in the way that he actually was. He first needs to turn Socrates into a champion of democracy. He also needs to Christianize Socrates a bit and dress him up as a tragicomic figure in the tradition of the blacks' struggle for freedom and justice, so he can have Socrates stand by the side of Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King, Jr. In other words, West, as he himself puts it, needs to "out-Socratize Socrates." (West, 213) To do this, he needs to make Socrates weep and care for the poor and the oppressed. West is "bothered…that Socrates never cries—he never shed a tear…[and] refuses to connect noble self-mastery to a heartfelt solidarity with the agony and anguish of oppressed people." (West, 213) However, West soon discovers that he would fail in his attempt to portray Socrates as a "bleeding heart liberal" and a devout Christian. He cannot make Socrates cry. He walks away feeling defeated while consoling himself with the thought that "[w]e need a bloodstained Socratic love and tear-soaked prophetic love fueled by a hard-won tragicomic hope." (West, 216)

In turning Socrates into a champion of democracy and an "exemplary democratic citizen," West engages in another act of misrepresenting history in such a way that complements his strange and inverted way of seeing ancient Athens' experiment with democracy. Against West's misrepresentation, it needs to be said that Socrates' fundamental problem with the government of the city and its officials was not that he thought they were corrupting or subverting democracy. His scathing criticism of the government and its officials did not stem from his intention to defend democracy against such subversions. Nor was he taking a stand for democracy by his criticisms. Socrates was far from all of these. *In the same way that he did not cry for the oppressed, Socrates did not care for democracy either.*

In fact, the Socrates of Plato's texts was philosophically opposed to the idea. He, along with the aristocrats of the city and their intellectuals, all of whom he held in disdain for their materialistic and immoral life-styles, believed that the *demos*, the people, should not be in the position of ruling. While the aristocrats opposed democracy because it threatened their power and interests, Socrates opposed it because he believed that the ordinary people lacked the knowledge, expertise, wisdom, and moral

fortitude which, he thought, were the essential qualifications in the business of ruling. While the city's aristocrats believed that the ruling was the rightful business of those with wealth, i.e., themselves, Socrates contended that ruling ought to be the rightful occupation of an aristocracy of knowledgeable, wise, and expert elites who would be spearheaded by a philosopher king. Socrates' analogies of the "shipmaster" and the "keeper of some huge and powerful creature" in Chapter XXI of *The Republic* clearly represent his elitist conception of ruling. Moreover, there is also other evidence to show that Socrates' intellectual-moral elitism had anti-egalitarian tendencies. His disdain for the Athenian practice of allowing ordinary citizens to speak in the assemblies is just one example.

Needless to say, there are those who, following Karl Popper, argue that the Socrates of Plato's text is not always Socrates as he really was, and try to draw a wedge between Socrates' "intellectualism," on the one hand, and Plato's "authoritarianism," on the other hand. Popper argued, "Socrates' intellectualism was fundamentally equalitarian and individualistic," with only a "minimum" level of "authoritarianism," whereas Plato's was "the embodiment of an unmitigated authoritarianism." (Popper, 1962, 131) Working with this contrast, Plato is often portrayed as the forerunner of modern totalitarianism, whereas Socrates is hailed as the original critical thinker. And then there are those who, showing historical insensitivities, like to equate being a critical thinker to being a free thinker, or being a supporter of the idea of freedom in its modern sense. Once Socrates is seen as a free thinker, or a supporter of the modern conception of freedom, and also once democracy is seen as a sub-category or a manifestation of the idea of freedom, then there is only a short distance to be traveled from seeing Socrates as a critical thinker to deifying him as a democratic thinker or as the champion of democracy. West seems to belong to this group.

The reason West wants to sell Socrates to us as the ultimate champion of democracy is that he shares Socrates' elitist view of democracy. There is nothing in *Democracy Matters* to suggest that West believes that people ought to rule themselves or that they are capable of doing so. And this is why the real significance and the fundamental value of the Athenian democracy are lost to him. The real genius of Athenian democracy was not that there was this virtuous, keen, and courageous questioner in the city who roamed around and made the pompous and corrupt elites of the city look stupid and immoral in the eyes of the public—as West wants us to believe—but that, for the first time in history, a city had developed a comprehensive theory and a set of institutions and practices that empowered its citizens to rule themselves.

West urges us to aspire to be like Socrates and learn to question the authority as he did, but he does not urge us to will to become participants in the decision-making structures and venues in our community, city, and the country. Nor does he give us any suggestions as to how we can go about becoming good deliberators or competent decision-makers on political and legislative issues that affect our lives. If we all do what West suggests, that is to say, to aspire to be like Socrates, we will all be standing on street corners, or sitting in offices, or on factory shop floors, questioning the authority. One would wonder then who would be cultivating the land, baking the bread, doing the work in the factory or in the office, and deliberating issues and making the important decisions? Wouldn't it be more realistic, and more productive, if we instead find a way to be part of the decision-making structures and processes in the offices, the factory shop floors, and the city hall?

Saving Democracy from Distortions of West and Others

West's effort to plant the idea of democracy in the soil of Christian morality, in one sense, can be seen as an attempt to confront the existing narcissism and materialism of our culture which, in many ways, complement the political culture underlying our pseudo-democracy. In a broader sense, West's intention to posit democracy as a cultural phenomenon can be thought of as an effort to restore to

democracy its original moral substance which has been gutted by the first two distortionist waves. However, I doubt that West has this in mind, for there is nothing in the book to suggest that he has an understanding of the original idea and the distortions it has suffered in the past.

Looking at the book from an opposite angle, one can see a different picture. One can argue that West's own contorted version of what democracy is in some ways goes hand in hand with the first two distorted versions, in that they all mislead us into believing that democracy is an elitist enterprise, and that it has no place or role for the citizens' active, direct, and ongoing participation. They all misguide us into thinking that as citizens we should be content with doing one or both of the following—and that this is all we should expect to be able to do in a democracy: (1) vote in elections regularly, write to our representatives, and give money to, or participate in, the campaigns of politicians who we think represent our interests, so that they can compete effectively against those whom we regard as not representing us (the elitist and economists' viewpoint); (2) protest government elites either directly by rallying in the streets or indirectly in works of art, literature, music, and through other symbolic acts of resistance (West's solution).

In limiting to these what we can do in, or what we should expect of, a democracy, West does a great disservice to the cause of democracy, in that he helps close our minds to the possibilities of a genuine vision of democracy and the potential political empowerment it can bring to us. This is most unfortunate, especially when one thinks of all those progressive-minded and left-leaning individuals who are genuinely committed to democracy, and look up to West and other intellectuals like him for political-philosophical guidance and inspiration.

To help undo the damage done by West, and by the first two distortionist waves, and also to enable us to break the shackles they have placed on our minds that prevent us from seeing democracy in its true light, we need to direct our attention to that part of recent history which West leaves out, namely, the democratic movement represented by SDS, the New Left, the women's movement, the racial justice movement, and everything else in the 1960s and early 1970s that was connected to the idea of "participatory democracy." Perhaps the first important document that called attention to this idea was *The Port Huron Statement* written in 1962 as the founding document of the Students for a Democratic Society. The document put forth the following vision:

> that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life;
>
> that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation
>
> that decision-making of basic social consequences be carried on by public groupings; that politics be seen positively, as the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations;
>
> that politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community, thus being a necessary, though not sufficient, means of finding meaning in personal life.
>
> that the political order should serve to clarify problems in a way instrumental to their solution. (Miller, 1987, 333)

In this vision, politics was understood primarily as a way of life. The participants in the movements of this period took it upon themselves to further expand and humanize the very meaning of politics. This meant that they had to involve everyday people in running the affairs of their communities. Thus, "the establishment of a democracy of individual participation" and providing "the media for their common participation" was the order of the day in many activist circles. It was taken for granted that, in order to participate, people had to be empowered—hence the slogan of "Power to the People!" was omnipresent in these circles. The political atmosphere of the period made it possible for numerous activists and scholars

to question the theoretical inconsistencies and the anti-democratic tendencies of liberal democracy. It also made it possible to develop new ways of thinking about democracy that were much closer to the original idea than liberal democracy was. Works such as those by C. B. Macpherson (1977; 1987), Carole Pateman (1970), Jane Mansbridge (1980), Andrew Levine (1981), and later by Benjamin Barber (1984) and Theodore Becker (2000) are among these.

In the last twenty years or so, the idea of participatory democracy has been developed in new directions that include "deliberative democracy," "direct democracy," and "e-democracy." Those who are genuinely concerned with the question of democracy cannot ignore these new ways of thinking about expanding citizens' participation in politics. Nor can—and nor should—they ignore the normative value inherent in the idea of ordinary citizens having the power and the means to take part in public deliberations and voting in person on major legislative and public policy issues.

Moreover, with the material wealth; economic productivity; technological infrastructures; social-political and cultural-educational institutions, facilities, and other resources at our disposal at this point in history, a genuine democrat would need to think, more than ever, in terms of expanding people's participation in politics in direct and deliberative ways. Given these resources, we should be able to expand the participatory models of democracy to levels very close to what the ancient Athenians had designed. *The latest advances in electronic technologies make it possible for us to establish a system of direct-deliberative democracy very similar to the ancient Athenian's*, but this time without its slaves and without its exclusionary limits on citizenship. We can do with great success what the Athenians wished to do but could not, for they lacked most of the essential prerequisites for a genuine form of democracy.

The fundamental principles and values underlying Athenian democracy were way ahead of their time, in that the objective and subjective conditions necessary for their realization had not been developed at the time. Athens lacked a productive system of economy which could provide an adequate standard of living for all of its residents without requiring them to work long and hard hours on a daily basis—hence freeing time for all adult residents to participate in democracy. (For one man to live comfortably and to have free time to participate in democracy, a few others had to toil all day long, and everyday, in order to provide him comfort and the means of subsistence—hence slavery of the majority by the minority in Athens.) Athens also lacked the cultural value-system and institutions necessary for the proper functioning of a genuine form of democracy. Athens' oppression and exploitation of women and non-Greeks, its refusal to grant the status of citizenship to them, and its slave-owning and colonialist norms are among some of its most egregious cultural failings. Finally, Athenian democracy lacked the political institutions and structures it needed to facilitate the participation of *all* of the adult residents in politics and protect their rights as citizens.

Unlike the Athens of twenty five centuries ago, our present society has all of the essential prerequisites for the establishment of a genuine form of direct and deliberative democracy. Our vast and potent networks and means of communication can more than compensate for the geographical vastness of the country and the large size of its population. *The possibility of the establishment of a direct-deliberative form of democracy is more real now than it has ever been in human history*. We just have to open our minds to, and prepare ourselves for, this possibility, and direct our energies toward turning it into a reality.

In preparing ourselves to embrace a participatory vision of democracy, we would need to turn a deaf ear to West and other intellectuals whose theories and visions of democracy fail to grasp this possibility, or fail to carve up a large space for the citizens' direct and positive participation in politics. Moreover, we need to let go of the rights-based conception of democracy, which, unfortunately, has a long tradition in the United

States. What we need to do instead is to develop citizen-centered and participation-based visions, theories, practices, and approaches to the question. (See Behrouzi, 2005b, for my share of contribution toward this end.)

West's distorted view of the idea of democracy has another dimension, which calls for a different type of response. As an intellectual whose "philosophy of democracy is deeply shaped by…Jesus," West is bent on Christianizing democracy and selling it to us as a culture imbedded in the values of the prophetic legacy of Jerusalem. (West, 214) Like any other deeply religious person, West must believe in the deepest depth of his soul that the ultimate human salvation is a matter for another world. He must believe that the attempt to build a human heaven on Earth, i.e., a genuine democracy, is human hubris that is destined to fail. However, this does not stop him from giving it a try.

What he ought to do in the ephemeral landscape of this world is to give building a genuine democracy a half-hearted attempt. If it works, then he would thank the Lord for making it possible. And if it fails, he would take a "dark joy" in thinking that he did what he could; that he told the truth, thought freely, showed compassion for the oppressed, and stood for the cause of justice. He could take solace in reminding himself that all will be right in the other world when we get there. And if he ends up suffering for the struggle and hence is forced to live a life of alienated and tragicomic existence, he then could take refuge in blues, jazz, and Toni Morrison, and would keep his "dark hope" alive. Like a good humble Christian, he would accept his defeat, and *when*—not *if*—he goes down, he would go down in "style, grace, and a smile that signifies that the seeds of democracy matters will flower and flourish somewhere and somehow and remember our gallant effort." (West, 214) This is how West ends the book.

Despite what West wants us to believe, neither Jesus nor Socrates were truly democrats. They were both other-worldly individuals, and as such, their commitments to, and engagements in, the affairs of this world, including democracy, were half-hearted at best, as they considered such engagements unworthy of their full attention. (Jesus' main concern was the kingdom of the other world and Socrates' was the non-material world of forms and his knowledge of it.) Both Jesus and Socrates saw the highest development of the individual in spiritual and intellectual pursuits and moral perfection, and not in participation in the affairs of this-worldly pursuits and enterprises, such as economics, politics, and democracy. In fact, they showed contempt for them. My point is that neither Jesus nor Socrates should be held out to us as either a philosopher or a champion of democracy. What we need are genuine moral commitments to the affairs of this world, and full-hearted attempts to solve its problems by developing genuine visions and practical models of democracy.

If we want a genuine democracy, we must attempt to politicize the people rather than trying to Jesusize and Socratize them. Instead of advocating or celebrating a tragicomic sense of social and individual existence, and celebrating a "dark hope"—which is but a spiritualized form of defeatism and pessimism dressed up in Christian clothing—we need to work toward promoting a participatory political vision that sees direct and positive forms of participation in politics and community as an integral part of the development of the human individual. What we need is a positive and a moral vision of life that puts forth a bright hope for democracy, and energizes us to find ways of developing the whole individual, both in this-worldly and other-worldly matters. Our vision should be a society that has an egalitarian political system, and strives to empower its citizens to take part in decision-making on matters that affect their lives. Instead of advocating contempt for politics and government, and directing people to camp outside of them in protest, we should encourage and direct them to take hold of government and politics and make them their own. We should exalt the virtues of contributing to politics and being part of the government rather than glorifying a sense of alienated and tragicomic existence in the streets and in arts

and literature. A “dark hope” and a tragicomic vision will not help us confront the nihilism that permeates our culture. Nor will they give us a genuine democracy or a just society. Instead, all they would accomplish is to intoxicate us with a dark sense of joy and a perverse sense of pleasure that one might relish in the aftermath of a dignified defeat.

West's culture-based—and one should add pessimistic and defeatist—conception of democracy must be rejected. Democracy is substantively a much broader idea and cannot be limited to the cultural domain, and hence, must be allowed to direct and regulate all three spheres of society: the state, culture, and economy. Democracy, to borrow a phrase from John Dewey, "*must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, the industry, religion*” in order to become fully realized. (Dewey, 1927, 143, italics added) A genuine type of democracy cannot exist without an accommodating type of culture. West is right in giving due consideration to the cultural components of the problem. However, he is wrong in leading us into thinking that culture is the main sphere for democracy.

The truth about democracy is simple and straightforward: If we want a genuine form of democracy, we need to take over the government and do the ruling ourselves, or at least, do the policy decision-making part of it—or at the very least do a good portion of it. *The primary locus of democracy is the political sphere*. A genuine form of democracy would require that citizens have the political power in their hands. The most important source of inspiration for us in this respect is the experience of ancient Athens, but of course, without its slaves and its other cultural and political failings. We would always need wise and knowledgeable individuals with character traits similar to Socrates' who would constantly badger us in order to keep us vigilant, and remind us that we need to live up to our social-moral and democratic commitments.

West wants to build democracy solely through developing a democratic culture, and to do this, he first wants to develop democratic traits among the people. But in the same way that tens of thousands of bricks would not amount to a house, tens of millions of individuals with democratic traits will not give us a democracy. To have a house, the bricks must be arranged in certain ways and cemented together in combination with other building materials. In case of building a genuine democracy, the structures and organizations of the state, the economy, and the civil society would work as the arrangements and the constructional materials needed to cement the democratic citizens into a social-political whole. West's solution to the problems of our pseudo-democracy, and his vision of a genuinely democratic society are both flawed, in that they do not address the need to alter the existing structures and organizations of the state, economy, and civil society.

As to shaping a culture whose citizens would possess "democratic individuality,” West shows neither appreciation for, nor awareness of, the importance of public deliberations in democracy. Leaving them out of the democratic picture is tantamount to losing sight of the importance of moral reasoning and epistemic considerations in democracy. Ethical considerations and social-political knowledge of issues are of utmost importance for making good democratic decisions. A genuine democracy cannot function properly without politically-educated citizens who are capable of deliberating. Moreover, an accommodating democratic culture cannot flourish, nor could it sustain itself, if it relies solely on the citizens possessing democratic mindsets and mores. Left alone and unchallenged, citizens can be deceived and manipulated; they can also become despondent and complacent, even apathetic. To sustain itself, and to flourish, a democratic culture would need the involvement of the various domains, institutions, and organizations of the civil society and the economy. More importantly, it would need the leadership of the state and the direct involvement of its institutions. To help keep citizens at high levels of vigilance and involvement with public affairs, and also to help nurture and keep alive public-spiritedness, civic virtues,

and other democratic traits and attitudes among the citizens, all spheres of society, especially the state, must do their share in nurturing the democratic political culture. Practicing and promoting public deliberations would be the most effective way of keeping citizens vigilant, aware, and involved—and hence keeping democracy alive and vibrant.

In putting together the moral elements needed to shape a vision for a genuine democracy, and for a culture that would accommodate it, we can draw from a wide range of human experiences, philosophical-intellectual traditions, artistic-literary works, and religious sources, including Christianity, which West is keen on keeping relevant to the question. Rather than putting democracy within the context of the sufferings of the past, I would argue that we need to find a way to put democracy within the framework of the best of what humanity has achieved in the course of the last few thousand years. We should see democracy in a positive light, that is to say, as a social-political, and economic, arrangement, and a "way of life," that empowers each and every member of the society to live a "good life." As to the "good life," we can envision it as the one that is directed toward the realization of a set of morally-valuable ends, and by that I mean the core of the aspirations and longings expressed in most forms of art, literature, philosophy, and religion in most cultures throughout history. Reverence and compassion for life; striving for peace, harmony, solidarity, and social stability; respect for individual autonomy; belief in the dignity and worth of each individual, in fairness and equality, in the amelioration of life's suffering, in pacification and the improvement of the conditions of human existence, and in the positive development of the human individual (artistic, intellectual, moral, civic, spiritual, and physical) would be among these ends. The vision of the "good society", or a genuinely democratic society, on the other hand, would be the extension of this vision of the "good life." The good or genuinely democratic society would be envisioned as the one that is committed to the principle of the positive development of the human individual, that is to say, a society that provides maximum feasible opportunities for all individuals to pursue and attain the good life, and does so on an egalitarian basis.

A genuine form of democracy would also need an accommodating democratic economy, something which escapes West's attention. A genuine democracy would have an egalitarian economy, and would treat its workers not as cogs in a profit-producing machine, but as valuable in themselves, and also as being capable of managing their work environments. As to work itself, a genuine democracy would regard it primarily as a means for its citizens to earn their livelihood (and secondarily as a subordinate arena for developing their potentials). Moreover, it would regard economy as the sphere of the material production of life's needs, and not the end of life itself. Nor would it allow economy or work to turn into tyrannical masters that would enslave life and society, as is the case in our pseudo-democracy. Instead of manipulating and luring its citizens into wasting and sacrificing their lives—i.e., working hard and long hours—in the service of the production of wealth, or instead of subjugating its citizens to the needs of economy (the *modus operandi* of our pseudo-democracy), a genuine form of democracy would place work and economy in the service of life and its needs.

Lastly, to counter the defeatist-tragicomic vision of life and the dark hope that West preaches, in what follows, I will attempt to put forth a positive ethical-spiritual vision, and a bright hope, for democracy, and here it is.

A genuine democracy entails visions of life and society that have strong spiritual and ethical dimensions. In direct contrast to our pseudo-democracy, whose culture impoverishes life by arresting it in the insecurity-ridden and anxiety-filled frame of mind of the marketplace—and deadens our ability to grasp life in its fullness—a genuine form of democracy would be a society with a more balanced culture. In a genuine form of democracy, the prevailing conception of life, now seen as a struggle for existence, would be transformed into an understanding that would regard living as striving for the development of the whole

person and the enrichment of social existence. Self-aggrandization, unbridled materialism, hyper-individualism, and hedonism would not be the predominant elements of the culture and its norms *par excellence*. The pursuit of artistic, intellectual, and spiritual modes of self-development, as well as self-development in the areas of civic skills and civic life, and political participation would be valued as much, if not more than, the pursuit of this-worldly goals and wealth. Life (in all of its civic, social, cultural, artistic, spiritual, and ecological forms) and the pursuit of life-affirming goals would take moral-intellectual and social-cultural priority over market-related or market-driven concerns.

Moreover, unlike our pseudo-democracy that depicts life primarily as material existence and economic activity, a genuine democracy would grasp it as primarily civic existence and moral-intellectual activity. The inner longings of individuals for deeper meanings and joy in life—which now can only take place in those short-lived moments when they manage to free themselves from the despotic domination of work and economic forces—would turn into reality, as they would be able to live a life full of joyous and meaningful experiences. They are now divided beings in conflict with themselves. They submit themselves, voluntarily, yet unwittingly, to the subtle slavery of the material culture, as they throw themselves into a frenzied rush in the pursuit of market-driven and market-induced goals and desires. However, they never succeed in reaching an inner satisfaction or the sense of peace they seek. Not only are these goals and desires essentially unachievable—in that the more they achieve, the more they desire—they are also there in part to enslave their minds and souls, and prevent them from seeing that the true peace they long for is in themselves, and in their community. All they achieve in this frenzied rush is a sense of false security and comfort, as they find themselves in the company of the rest of the restless crowd, as they collectively conform to the norms of the material and consumer culture that shackle their minds and dull their souls.

In a genuine participatory democracy, the driving force behind individuals' life activities would be their longing to develop their whole selves. Their struggles would then center on striking a balance between developing their moral-intellectual and spiritual sides, on the one hand, and attending their this-worldly needs and wants, on the other. Moreover, realizing that their whole selves are not entirely in their inner selves, they would also seek to strike a balance between their self-focused growth and goals, and their outer needs to seek communion with others in their civic-existence—hence honoring their community-centered, political, and citizenship responsibilities. In a genuine participatory democracy, civic participation would be a necessary condition for individuals' realization of their potentials.

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