memberships, and plural in their practices. These differences have to be negotiated in political life, and claims and conflicts mediated through democratic processes. (Jordan 1998: 162)

It is to the analysis of the political structures to accommodate the ideals of community that we must now turn. What should be clear is that considerable problems emerge when community is merely asserted as a replacement for the state. Such a strategy is unfeasible in complex societies and, whilst community may be a desirable phenomenon that we want to encourage in policy-making, it can only be empowered as a complementary institution to the state. This, of course, does not preclude debate about the parameters of the state or the types of services that it provides. Indeed, according to radical approaches to community, the debate about the state will generate considerable public dialogue and a confrontation of political standpoint.

- NOTES -

1. Whilst community is invoked by New Labour in terms of crime prevention and punishment, simultaneously it also tends to promote a populist punitiveness that feeds upon the electoral popularity of discourses such as 'prison works'. The latter is discussed in detail in Garland (2001).

2. Megan's laws refer to legislation introduced in the United States to combat the problem of sex offenders in the aftermath of the murder of Megan Kanka by a paedophile.

3. An example of this kind of strategy could be the involvement of the gay community in the fight against hate crimes in local crime and disorder strategies. I am grateful to Gordon Hughes for drawing my attention to the existence of these kinds of measures in some local authorities.

4. There is a large and growing literature on basic income that I cannot cover in depth here. Nonetheless many of the key debates of the 1990s are covered in Liddle (1998) where a fuller picture of my own position is evident. What follows here will focus on the community aspect of these debates and more recent contributions on basic income such as that of Jordan (1998).

CHAPTER 7

Repoliticising Community: Towards Democratic Renewal

The difference between orthodox political communitarianism and more radical perspectives is clearly demonstrated when we examine the understanding of politics in each of these approaches. In simple terms there is an almost palpable hostility to the formal political sphere in orthodox communitarianism. For commentators such as Etzioni, the community should replace the state wherever possible as the main agent of political control in order to decentralise power and replace the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of state mechanisms. In so doing the domain of professional politicians would diminish as decision-making was relocated downwards to the sphere of community. For orthodox communitarians this would not only depoliticise much policy-making. Because they assume the existence of a homogeneous moral community (although containing different groups within it), then decisions would be taken according to that universal morality rather than for political reasons. For this reason, orthodox political communitarians envisage a position whereby decision-making is driven by an apolitical morality that they deem to be more desirable than the self-interest of supposedly representative politicians.

Radical communitarian perspectives would share some of these sympathies but would disagree fundamentally with the understanding of politics that emerges from it. Like orthodox commentators, radicals share a degree of scepticism about the capacity of the state to understand the needs of communities or to act effectively to guarantee them. Moreover they would also concur that decision-making needs to be decentralised because they believe that there are fundamental limitations in the system of representative democracy. Therefore both radicals and orthodox communitarians would agree on the importance of devolution, decentralisation and greater
of power will entail more politics rather than less. The vital upshot of this is the recognition of a continued role for the state. Conflicts need to be mediated and settled because there is no overarching moral voice. In this sense, then, the state remains as the ultimate arbiter. At the same time, radical communitarians agree with their orthodox counterparts that the strategy of subsidiarity should prevail. Thus decisions should be taken at the lowest, most decentralised level possible. It is only where incomensurable viewpoints clash that the state should be called upon to intervene in community affairs.

This vision of community owes much to the radical democratic theory of Mouffe (2000b). She criticises contemporary liberals such as Rawls for their advocacy of a 'well-ordered society', and this criticism can be extended to political communitarians who promote the universal moral voice as an alternative to the universal theory of justice of the early Rawls. Mouffe argues that a genuinely pluralist politics will contain considerable diversity and therefore conflict. However this does not mean that those whom we perceive as different from ourselves are automatically enemies or adversaries; we can construct the political arena around a recognition of the validity of alternative arguments to our own. This implies a more discursive understanding of politics than that of modern liberal democracy but, unlike many theories of deliberative democracy, it does not assume that participants in debates are equal or will have an equal access to decision-making. Thus the existence of a space for political dialogue does not entail that the actors therein participate on the same footing. For Mouffe, theories of the well-ordered society such as those that emerge from Third Way thinking fail to grasp power differentials that permeate contemporary societies. Thus, in terms of emancipatory politics, if we want to envisage the making of a new hegemony the traditional understanding of left and right needs to be redefined; but whatever the content we give to those categories, one thing is sure: there comes a time when one needs to decide on which side to stand in their agonistic confrontation' (Mouffe 2000b: 15).

This commitment to agonistic pluralism that characterises more radical approaches to community stands in contrast to the search for political consensus in orthodox political communitarianism. The latter wants to avoid criticisms that it reflects moral majoritarianism and stresses the common foundation of the moral voice of community. According to Frazer (1999: 41–2), there are three main elements of the communitarian pursuit of political consensus. First, it implies a substructure of common values and beliefs in which social differences are overiden. Second, it suggests that consensus can derive from universal participation. Third, it focuses on the way consensus can emanate from a 'human-level' politics that is taken out of the hands of self-interested professional politicians. In the light of these features of the pursuit of consensus, political communitarians are able to agree that, to borrow the title of the book by Anthony Giddens, their position is 'beyond left and right'. Radicals find this depiction of politics problematic because it presupposes that consensus is achievable. Whilst there may be more or less agreement on given issues, radicals view a situation where all in society concur on moral principles as reflective only of a homogeneous community that bears no resemblance to the reality of modern Western societies. The latter are fundamentally complex and political. In this sense it 'cannot be a feature of a theory of politics that agreement be attained or premissed on the values and reasons underlying individuals' choices and conclusions regarding particular issues. This means that "politics" is a never-ending process' (Frazer 1999: 226).

In short, then, radical approaches to community disagree with the notion of consensus that is envisaged by orthodox communitarians. Radicals regard the latter as apolitical and, as such, divorced from the lived experience of Western societies today and, increasingly, societies across the world. The problem with the orthodox perspective is based upon the idea of 'the' community. By presenting community as exhaustive of 'the social', they cannot deal with the fact that there is considerable diversity in the modern world without resorting to the fabrication of an overall morality. Radicals do not equate community with society; instead society comprises many different communities (as well as a wide range of other forms of association) that confer differing identities on the individuals therein. Because each of us is a member of different communities and associations, society is made up of individuals all of whom have separate identities. In such a scenario the idea of a common moral voice appears anachronistic.
There is little agreement among communitarians and their critics about the meaning of community. The undertheorisation of the concept has led to a distinct absence of clarity when it comes to the politics of community. A major concern with regard to the meaning of community relates to the size and geographical space that communities are supposed to occupy. On top of this there is also a concern over the nature of the relationships that are supposed to be communitarian and how they differ from other forms of political association. Both of these issues have profound implications for the theorisation of community and the role it may be given in the political organisation of modern societies.

As we have seen, orthodox political communitarianism, such as that of Amitai Etzioni, does allow for the existence of different groups within society. Thus, it is feasible using his model to argue that there are a number of different communities within society. However, in terms of providing the overall moral voice that governs the community as a political agent, orthodox communitarians focus on community as society. In this sense they advocate a scenario whereby an overarching unified morality guides 'the' community and governs the behaviour of the range of associational groups that exist within that political community. Thus, despite the recognition that society contains divergent social groups, orthodox political communitarians are primarily interested in society as 'the' community. To make this point clear, it is worthwhile quoting Etzioni's own definition of community. He states that:

A community is a group of people who share criss-crossing affective bonds and a moral culture. By asserting this definition, I mean to indicate clearly that communities need not be local and are distinct from mere interest groups, in that they address a broad band of human needs. People who band together to gain privileged treatment for office equipment make an interest group; those who share a history, identity and fate, a community. (Etzioni 2000b: 9)

This, I would contend, is a fairly innocuous definition of community (although it doesn't provide the full picture of Etzioni's view). In this framework there is indeed scope for a variety of different communities within a society. All that is required of a community is a shared identity that is not solely based upon self-interest and an overarching moral code that is recognised by all members. Etzioni allows for the fact that within this limited definition there is scope for conflict within the community and, to this end, there is little that radicals might find constraining. However, later in the same article, Etzioni adds meat to the bare bones of this definition, and here problems begin to emerge as the divergent communities appear subservient to a greater moral voice – that of society as a whole: communities underpin a moral culture. They define what a society considers virtuous, provide approbation for those who live up to these definitions, and censor those who do not, thus reducing the need for policing' (Etzioni 2000b: 9). Here Etzioni's agenda becomes clearer. Communities do not have their own moral culture per se, rather they underpin a broader morality. Thus it is the role of communities to substantiate the dominant moral culture. In this view, community is not where we experience and enjoy our differing moralities, it is the strut for the dominant moral voice of society. Community becomes the forum in which we adjudge individual behaviour and punish those who do wrong, according to the dominant morality. In this sense, communities are indeed political agents but are driven by an agenda that represents the overall social morality.

Indeed, Etzioni is very clear about what he sees as the agenda for communitarians. It is not, he says, to define this entity that we call community. Rather, it is to fill the moral vacuum created by the demise of tradition and the failure of liberals to provide a replacement to guide society. Thus there is a slippage in Etzioni's thought between 'the' community and society in the search for the moral virtues by which we should all live within any given society. To be quite clear then, orthodox political communitarianism is not really concerned with the concept of community but with the establishment of social morality. In Etzioni's words, 'there can be no community, nor a stable society, without a shared moral culture' (Etzioni 2000b: 9). This slippage between community and society is problematic for radicals, who, though they see the importance of debates over morality, are not prepared to wish away flippantly the need to clarify what we mean by community. Indeed it could be argued that the failure of orthodox political communitarians to enter these debates has contributed to not only the reception of their ideas by their critics as vague and woolly but also their political success. For example, commentators such as Frazer (1999) have noted how the whole project of communitarianism is undermined by those who focus on moral virtues rather than political agency.

To this end it is worth examining again the work of André Gorz (1999), who has attempted to fill this void by establishing a clearer differentiation between community and society. Initially Gorz (1999: 117) differentiates
between associative communities, where our common endeavours are at least partially chosen, and constitutive communities which reflect our associations with others that we were born into (otherwise known as communities of choice and communities of fate respectively). However, what both these forms of community share is the communal, informal nature of the relationships therein. For Gorz, these associations lose their status as communities whenever the bonds move towards the formal through the introduction of contracts or the institutionalisation of juridical rules. Once the bonds between individuals have to be formalised and regulated by institutional structures, then the communal bond that holds these groups together is undermined. It is the nature of these bonds, then, that differentiates community from society:

Society . . . is too large, differentiated and complex for the relations between its 'members' to be regulated communicatively and spontaneously. One does not belong to a society, then, in the same way as one belongs to a community. One belongs to it not as a concrete person, having, by one's origin or through co-operation, a shared life with the others, but as a citizen; that is to say, as an abstract person defined in one's universality by established, juridically formalized rights (and duties), guaranteed by a state. (Gorz 1999: 118)

According to this formulation of community, then, community is not defined by locality or spatial boundaries. Rather, it is established according to the types of relationships that individuals have in particular associations. It may well be that these relations are best suited to geographic proximity, but they are not defined by them. We may have common, non-instrumental links with individuals with whom we as individuals have little direct contact. This ably demonstrates that Etzioni's depiction of society as 'the' community is inherently problematic because it fails to recognise the different ways in which relationships are established in different spheres. Thus the problem with Etzioni's analysis is not his focus on virtue – Gorz too highlights particular virtues of community – but that orthodox communitarianism is unaware of the ways in which formal relationships in society as a whole are predicated upon a different set of principles than those of community. Indeed, Gorz goes so far as to say that, when we look at the virtues of the different spheres, modern society is 'the antithesis of community' (Gorz 1999: 118).

From this differentiation, Gorz goes on to make a further distinction between what he terms 'co-operative' communities (of choice) and 'constitutive' communities (of fate). He argues that the bonds in the latter are stronger than in the former because we are members of these communities without choice and on an equal footing. Gorz contends that we are members of religious or ethnic communities due to the bare fact of being born or inducted into these associations and that this provides all in those constitutive communities with an equal status as members. This will not be the case with 'co-operative' communities of choice in which individuals engage to a greater or lesser extent. Thus we may choose to be more or less active in the 'co-operative' associations that we elect to join, and some of the communities of which we are a part may play a more fundamental role in our social identity than others. In this sense, just as there is an element of choice over whether we join these communities, there is also a degree of choice over the extent to which we participate in them. For Gorz, this is important because 'it is quite clear . . . that in a highly differentiated modern society the communal allegiances of each individual do not exhaust his/her reality, do not define all that he/she is' (Gorz 1999: 120).

Gorz recognises, then, that in modern societies identity and meaning is frequently derived as much from co-operative communities as from constitutive communities. Whilst this may make communal identities less rooted than was the case when constitutive communities were the major source of identity, Gorz believes that we should encourage the expansion of co-operative communities. The alternative, he argues, would be a retreat towards an unthinking tribalism or fundamentalism in which individuals define themselves solely in relation to the associations they are born or indoctrinated into. This scenario diminishes the potential of individuals asking who they are and questioning their relationships with others. Rather, individuals may uncritically assert that they are who they are and see no need to engage with 'the other'. Radicals are sceptical of such purely constitutive identities because, even where diversity is likely to generate conflict and dissent in some areas, this does not negate the desirability of individuals engaging with those different from themselves. Only through such a political process can diverse societies manage to cohere:

The idea of 'communitarian society' expresses nostalgia for a simple, transparent, pre-modern world in which society would operate like an originary community: each member's identity and rights would be grounded in his/her belonging to that community by birth. In such a society, that identity and those rights would depend not on what one does, but what one is – by birth . . . By elevating birth . . . into the basic criterion of each person's dignity and rights, the national-communitarian ideology makes it possible to conjure away differences of class, wealth and social position, and to repress conflicts between dominant and
a process of mediation to take place. The more applicable model for events 43 are as in the most applicable form of potential communications. The conditions of different communications' exchanges are not the same. The exchanges between the conditions of exchanging different communications' exchanges are not the same. The exchanges between the conditions of exchanging different communications' exchanges are not the same. The exchanges between the conditions of exchanging different communications' exchanges are not the same. The exchanges between the conditions of exchanging different communications' exchanges are not the same.
the radical perspective on community is that of associational, or associative, democracy which attempts to formulate a pluralistic vision of participatory groups and associations that accommodates the realities of diversity. It is to the usefulness and applicability of such a model that we now turn.

**Communities and Associative Democracy**

The most notable expression of theories of associative democracy has been provided by Paul Hirst (1994), who makes major claims for the potential of such a model:

> Associationalism makes accountable representative democracy possible again by limiting the scope of state administration, without diminishing social provision. It enables market-based societies to deliver the substantive goals desired by citizens, by embedding the market system in a social network of coordinative and regulatory institutions. It is a political idea that is big enough to offer the hope of radical reform, and to mobilize political energies in doing so, but it is specific enough to be developed within and added to our existing institutions. (Hirst 1994: 12–13)

According to this depiction of associative democracy, then, it is a system that can be introduced through gradualist reform of our existing political institutions in Western liberal democracies. Hirst sees this as a major strength, insofar as there is no requirement for radical upheaval or social unrest. Moreover he sees associative democracy as transcending traditional ideological divisions, and it is therefore capable of harnessing widespread support from across the political spectrum. He explicitly links it with the advocacy of civil society as the sphere of society in which a range of diverse groups and associations with different moralities and ways of life can be empowered to follow their own particular pathway to the good life. Thus associative democracy is constructed as a set of ideas and institutions that transcend the limitations of statist models of social organisation and traditional systems of representative democracy. According to Hirst, this task of moving beyond traditional political fissures should not be presented as radical in the way that some new social movements have tended to trumpet their opposition to existing forms of liberal democracy. Instead, he advocates 'the common cause that very different movements may find in gaining the freedom to build their own self-governing communities in civil society' (Hirst 1994: 14).

Clearly the associative model of democratic politics does hold potential for the radical theory of community, although, as Hirst implies, it could also provide a system for more orthodox or national-communitarian arrangements. The fact that it is envisaged as an improvement to existing institutional frameworks suggests that it would be suitable for the orthodox political communitarian project of permitting cultural difference within an overarching moral community. Nonetheless by now we are well aware of the limitations of such a theory, not least in the way it could stifle difference rather than allowing it to flourish. Hirst's emphasis on enabling different groups and associations to follow their own vision of the good is potentially radical because it does not require a common moral commitment. Rather, it focuses on a common understanding of politics as the forum through which different moralities co-exist and which enable diverse groups of people to live together in relative harmony. It promises decentralisation and participation in ways that appear to offer quite fundamental changes to the representative systems that currently dominate liberal democracies. Nonetheless it is not so clear that the pluralist conception that Hirst employs is as aware of the need to recognise conflict as is the case with more radical visions such as Mouffe's agonistic pluralism (Mouffe 2000b). As such, the utility of associative democracy for radical conceptions of community is identifiable, but, at the same time, the two positions do not equate with each other.

In Hirst's model of associative democracy the guiding principle is not to do away with functions of liberal democracy such as voting or the necessity of a regulatory state. Rather, he prefers a system in which 'as many of the affairs of society as possible are managed by voluntary and democratically self-governing associations' (Hirst 1994: 19). The key to the radical potential of such a strategy is the impact that an arrangement of this kind would have on the nature of politics. As argued in Chapter 8 however, this kind of civil society politics contains a number of different approaches. In political terms some civil society politics envisage the harmonious coexistence of numerous groups and associations. Frequently this kind of analysis goes hand in hand with theories of deliberative or discursive democracy in which differences between groups are resolved through the agreements that would be forged if groups were able to enter into perfectionist forms of dialogue. Radical democrats have often argued that such a model, notable in the work of Jurgen Habermas, is problematic because it invokes a model of discourse in which power differentials between the participants are overcome. For radical democrats, the practical applicability of such a model is highly questionable given the ubiquity and acute impact
of power differentials. Thus, although most versions of civil society politics 'see such participation giving life to the body politic' (Carter and Stokes 1998: 14), there are clear differences in the way in which politics is to be invigorated. A radical view of civil society must not only note the need for different groups to actually engage with one another but also recognise that such engagement will not always yield optimally harmonious outcomes. The need for the state as the mediator of such engagements is evident, even if the state may be incapable of containing all of the conflicts that may emerge.

A role for the state in associative democracy is explicit in Hirst’s proposals. He recognises that associations need to be protected if they are to carry out their democratic functions and that the state must help in the process of socially embedding market mechanisms and extending welfare provision. Nonetheless Hirst is keen to articulate the ways in which such a role for the state would not lead to authoritarianism and bureaucracy. Instead he argues that ‘voluntary self-governing associations’ must become the main source of political decision-making and that the defining associative principle must be that governance is devolved to the lowest possible level as appropriate in any given area. Moreover it is essential that associative democracy does not become bound up with the finality of election results or rely on simple majorities in decision-making. Rather, it is vital that governance is open and accessible and that appropriate channels of communication are used to transmit information and decisions to those who will be affected. Hirst believes that in such a model:

Associationalism attempts to construct a political framework within which individuals and the groups they create through voluntary association . . . can pursue different public goods whilst remaining in the same society. Plural groups share a limited, but common, set of public rules and regulatory institutions, which ensure that their differing goals and beliefs can be accommodated without undue conflict or the infringements of the rights of individuals and associations. (Hirst 1994: 20)

Associative democracy will not come about accidentally nor are governments likely to volunteer to devolve their powers. What is required, according to Hirst, is pressure from below, whereby associations and groups in civil society demonstrate their capacity to govern their own concerns and come together to pressurise government for the devolution of power. This, of course, recognises the necessity of governments and state institutions that are not actively opposed to subsidiarity. Moreover it also implies a commitment from associative groups to come together and organise politically. This is a realistic suggestion from Hirst, but it does run the risk of groups with power and influence having a greater impact on the shape of the associative structures that emerge than less powerful associations or communities. Moreover we cannot assume that governments or the state will readily give up their powers or that associative groups and communities are sufficiently organised to carry out an extended political role.

Associational theories are based upon pluralistic concerns for the promotion of diversity and difference and suggest that, as with radical theories of community, we have a multiplicity of identities that derive from the various parts of social life in which we participate. Thus, there should be greater political recognition of our membership of a range of groups and associations. These may involve our work and our locality but will also include our families, and other social networks of which we are a part, such as sports clubs, religious organisations, voluntary groups, political parties, sexual communities, charities, reading circles, social movements, pressure groups and so on. In this sense, Hirst’s arguments ‘make it possible to imagine a society with widespread participation in decision-making over a wide range of issues. It makes it possible to move towards radical notions of pluralist democracy’ (Cochrane 1998: 260). Cochrane notes how this kind of individuated approach to social identity promotes notions of difference as being healthy in a way that rarely finds expression in the world of formal electoral politics. Against Hirst’s thesis, however, Cochrane suggests that it fails to devote sufficient attention to power differentials between different groups. Thus the latter suggests that, as is the case now, certain groups have more power in the voluntary sector and that there is an underrepresentation of ethnic minorities, women, the unemployed and the working class. Whilst this is the case, Hirst would presumably suggest that an empowered associational sector would provide greater status for the forms of association that these underrepresented groups in the contemporary voluntary sector engage in. Hirst’s thesis focuses on the legitimation of a range of forms of association which are currently marginalised. At the same time it requires something of a leap of faith to believe that current inequalities would not be evident in future associative democratic arrangements.

In his later work Hirst (1998) presents his model of associative democracy as an alternative strategy to tackle the conditions fostered by the increasing automation of production and exchange, the globalisation of our economies and the problem of an ageing population. From this basis, he believes that the future problems of the welfare state are clearly identifiable today and that associational models, including a guaranteed universal citizen’s income,
offer potential solutions to the risks and dangers that we must tackle in the future. The first of these risks that Hirst identifies is that of structural unemployment, the growth of low-paid work that does not meet subsistence needs, and the underemployment of great swathes of the population. He sees this as the basis of social fragmentation between elite minorities and the majority of the population. The answer, he suggests, is to provide a guaranteed minimum income through a transfer payment or a tax credit that would enable everyone to participate in meeting their welfare needs. A second risk that Hirst addresses is the problem of globalisation. Of course, he is also a strident critic of the globalisation thesis (Hirst and Thompson 1996), and he suggests that there is considerable evidence that associational social provisions would not impact negatively upon our economic performance. He argues that the different strategies of welfare in 'successful' countries would imply that there is not one model that equates with success in globalised markets. In this scenario Western economies have no need to drive down the costs of welfare or the services that are provided and, therefore, it would seem that a guaranteed income would be viable.

The third risk that is dealt with in Hirst's analysis is that of the ageing population and its socio-economic implications. He believes that associational strategies can assist the transitions ahead by breaking down the barriers between employment and unemployment. Thus, he suggests that it is unrealistic to expect large sections of the population to be economically inactive and still survive on very low incomes. By allowing and recompensing different types of participation alongside a citizen's income, associationalism provides ways of preventing the social exclusion of this growing sector of society. By providing greater recognition of the voluntary sector, associationalism could make greater use of the skills and abilities of older people rather than discarding them once they reach retirement age. The great strength of Hirst's analysis is that, whether one agrees with his prescriptions or not, he has explicitly recognised the ways in which political renewal cannot be disassociated from key issues of social and economic reform. As with the radical theory of community, associative democracy is founded on the interdependence of political, social and economic issues.

Hirst's advocacy of associative democracy is focused on transcending the old private–public divide, and the impact that that dualism has on debates about future political and social organisation. Thus 'associationalism is as concerned to democratise civil society as it is to devolve the powers of state to voluntary organisations' (Hirst 1998: 86). Therefore, he believes that democratisation necessitates a rejection of the marketisation of public institutions and the unaccountable influence of private corporations in public functions. Democratisation, then, involves the empowerment of individuals to take control over their own lives in a collective fashion and to establish more localised and communitarian forms of governance. In the light of this, Hirst recognises the failings of the Keynesian welfare state but rejects the accusation that associationalism amounts to privatisation and the legitimisation of possessive individualism. Like John Keane in his understanding of civil society, Hirst recognises the importance of the state in this new structure: 'it would remain as a standard setter, inspector and determiner of overall funding levels' (Hirst 1998: 90). In this sense, associationalism and the advocacy of civil society are concerned with new methods of governance and the extension of welfare rather than a surrender to private provision and marketisation. Hirst claims that 'it may be the only route to social solidarity in a pluralistic and individualistic society' (Hirst 1998: 91), and in this he may be right. However, as Cochrane (1998) notes, there need to be concentrated attempts to empower those who have often been underpopulated in the realms of associational participation and this requires a recognition of some of the traditional problems of pluralism (Mouffe 2000b).

**Negotiation, Contingency and Compromise:**

Towards Communitarian Governance?

Various attempts have been made to circumvent the traditional pitfalls of pluralist theory, such as Rawls' political liberalism or the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy. However, as Mouffe notes, these models have failed, insofar as they rely on an unworkable separation of the private and the public in the case of Rawls and a narrow proceduralism that attempts to preclude the possibility of contestation in the work of Habermas (Mouffe 2000b: 90–2). Neither approach satisfies Mouffe, who argues that they insulate politics and ignore the realities of diverse societies:

Democratic theory should renounce those forms of escapism and face the challenge that the recognition of the pluralism of values entails. This does not mean accepting a total pluralism, and some limits need to be put to the kind of confrontation which is going to be seen as legitimate in the public sphere. But the political nature of the limits should be acknowledged instead of being presented as requirements of morality or rationality. (Mouffe 2000b: 93)
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The model of empowered engagement in dialogue within a framework of decision-making is illustrated as follows in the sum of the text:
In the context of risk society subpolitics features groups with a reflexive relationship with the environment around them. In this sense there is a scepticism or a critical relationship between individuals and groups on the one hand and the traditional sources of political and social authority on the other. Beck’s thesis corresponds with the radical democratic agenda precisely because it recognises and indeed encourages sources of conflict as evidence of a critical politics. This equates to a fundamentally different understanding of the political than that in the formal political arena: ‘politics breaks open and erupts beyond the formal responsibilities and hierarchies... the political constellation of industrial society is becoming unpoltical, while what was unpoltical in industrialism is becoming political’ (Beck 1997: 99). For Beck, this is evidence of the reinvention of politics.

Beck’s thesis on the reinvention of politics imagines the political sphere as much more fluid and less systematic than the old political organisation. Thus there is little fixity and less certainty than in orthodox understandings of politics as the formal arena of parties and parliaments. What Beck rejects, in a vein similar to André Gorz, is the nature of systems and the rules and regulations that tend to characterise systems generally. Subpolitics, on the other hand, refers to political activity that does not merely follow externally directed rules but is instead reflexive, that is, subpolitics involves attempts to change the rules of the political game. Thus subpolitics ‘is measured by the degree and quality of politics’ (Beck 1997: 134). Beck’s depiction of the reinvention of politics as a more creative, critical set of attitudes accompanied by scepticism of established institutions is an alluring prospect for radical visions of community. However the real existence of a qualitatively superior political sphere is somewhat questionable. Beck rightly notes the growth of scepticism and cynicism with regard to the formal political arena and the individuals and parties that occupy it. Similarly his idea of a public that is critical of scientific rationality and traditional sources of authority and hierarchy is also sound. However, this does not equate with a qualitatively better politics. In many respects what we tend to see is the extension of civic privatism where individuals withdraw from political debate due to their disregard for the traditional way of doing politics. Individuals, rather than immersing themselves in the political, may retreat into a world of family, job and narrow individualistic concerns.

Of course, Beck would be right to argue that these are indeed intensely political spaces and the potential sources of new political debates. However, this does not mean that the ways in which we interact within these new political spheres is automatically a qualitative improvement in the nature of politics. Similarly the idea that our privatistic engagement with our narrow world could result in a rule-changing politics seems aspirational rather than a representation of contemporary reality. Nonetheless the overall rejection of the formal political arena is commonplace – the question is what replaces it! Arguably in the contemporary era there is something of a political vacuum and an absence of legitimacy in the formal processes of government. However that does not entail a replacement of a tired old politics with a new vibrant, dynamic form of participatory engagement. Where Beck is persuasive is in identifying the need to replace dying political institutions with more radical arrangements, but he must also recognise the resilience of the state and the difficulties of bringing about a programme of reform. In other words the crisis of the current system – that is, the absence of legitimacy in the public eye – does not translate into its replacement with superior institutions or better forms of decision-making.

Beck’s analysis of the conditions of the new modernity is based upon doubt, scepticism and criticism. As such, it relates clearly to radical democratic politics and radical rather than orthodox theories of community. For Beck, doubt and scepticism are positive phenomena because they question old truths and the validity and legitimacy of any claims of truth. In this sense, doubt legitimises criticism and scepticism of all of our views – if we can challenge the validity of the views of others then perhaps we can accept that our own views may not be true. Importantly Beck sees this as a scenario with the potential to do away with others as ‘enemies’ – others become ‘fellow or opposing doubters’ because ‘doubt implies multiple voices, opposing voices on all sides and in each of us’ (Beck 1997: 169).

The universality of doubt is of course dubious. The idea that we are all equally beset by doubt clearly does not characterise the contemporary world, but Beck is persuasive in arguing that the acceptance of doubt and criticism offers a basis upon which to develop the kind of compromise that Jordan advocates. Nonetheless decision-making, even if doubt prevails, must have some kind of basis in rationality. Beck recognises that new forms of rationality will emerge but also that such rationalities are not in themselves truths. Radical communitarian politics are more likely to emerge when we recognise that our rationalities are competing and may not be appropriate. We are more likely to compromise or accept our failure to have our way on a given issue when we are able to question the validity of all our rationalities. Nonetheless there is little evidence that such a culture of self-doubt exists in contemporary society. If anything, the scepticism about politics and science that Beck proclaims has led to a retreat into private certainties and a lack of...
political

occur, orthodox communitarians reject pluralism and diversity (regardless of orthodox political communitarianism is that it pretends that confrontation and conflict by constructing and imposing moral unity, radical theories embrace conflict and argue that solidarity can emerge from the expression of our diversity and the varying rationalities that our outlooks on life generate. Mouffe expresses this perspective in forthright terms:

A well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation between democratic political positions, and this requires a real debate about possible alternatives. Consensus is indeed necessary but it must be accompanied by dissent... Consensus is needed on the institutions which are constitutive of democracy. But there will always be disagreement concerning the way social justice should be implemented in these institutions. In a pluralist democracy such a disagreement should be considered as legitimate and indeed welcome. (Mouffe 2000b: 113)

Mouffe's thesis contends that difference and conflict are necessary and welcome to a functioning pluralist democracy, but that these disagreements must be agonistic rather than antagonistic. Thus her position suggests that it is not disagreement per se that inhibits contemporary democracies, but, rather, it is the antagonistic fashion in which such differences manifest themselves that generates political and social problems. Therefore she contends that 'the aim of democratic politics should be to provide the framework through which conflicts can take the form of an agonistic confrontation among adversaries instead of manifesting themselves as an antagonistic struggle between enemies' (Mouffe 2000b: 117). The problem of orthodox political communitarianism is that it pretends that confrontation can be overridden by the dominant morality. By trying to circumvent disagreement and present a politics in which conflict does not and need not occur, orthodox communitarians reject pluralism and diversity (regardless of the rhetoric they employ). A genuinely democratic pluralism must recognize the unavoidability of confrontation and dispute. The challenge, then, is to construct ways of overcoming such conflict in the process of reaching decisions and avoiding social fragmentation. Communitarianisms (or liberalism-for that matter) that want to constrain such expressions of plurality to the private sphere lead to exclusionary outcomes. A system that decides ante what ideas and rationalities are to govern the public sphere cannot accommodate diversity in an inclusive fashion. The system of public expression is itself subject to conflict and debate. There is no universal set of institutions or principles to which all societies can adhere and thereby guarantee pluralistic democracy and diversity.

What then are to be the forms of deliberation that allow society to function? If conflict is unavoidable, how will society be held together? Clearly the answers to these questions will not be clear cut if they can be answered at all. What must be rejected is the idea that we can reach a harmonious consensus on these issues. By their very nature these questions lead to disagreement rather than consensus. There is no one rationality that can provide the answers to these questions but merely competing perspectives on the preferred system to ameliorate these disagreements. For theorists such as Mouffe this leads to a rejection of models of deliberative democracy such as those developed (in different ways) by Habermas and Rawls. Thus, she argues that there are no universally applicable procedural criteria that can circumvent power inequalities that exist within pluralistic societies. Moreover attempts to find a rationality that encapsulates these universal procedures merely reflect the beliefs of certain individuals and groups and are therefore interpretations of rationality rather than empirical facts. Just as diverse societies will generate disagreement, so such competing views on the world will lead to competing rationalities. The attempt to assert the legitimacy of one over any other reflects certain vested interests rather than universality or impartiality. To this end, Mouffe asserts that 'it is not by providing arguments about the rationality embodied in liberal democratic institutions that one can contribute to the creation of democratic citizens. Democratic individuals can only be made possible by multiplying the institutions, the discourses, the forms of life that foster identification with democratic values' (Mouffe 2000b: 96). From this perspective, the critique of liberal democratic theory constructed by deliberative democrats is accepted. What is not is the way that they replace orthodox theories of liberal democracy with their own alternative procedures and rationalities. In short Mouffe argues that we need to put 'the emphasis on the types of
practices [of democracy] and not the forms of argumentation' (Mouffe 2000b: 96).

Importantly, Mouffe sees power as inescapable insofar as it is 'constitutive of social relations'. The fallacy in models of deliberative democracy, then, is their attempt to construct political spaces in which power relations either do not exist at all or are irrelevant in that public sphere. It is this critique that forms the foundation of 'agonistic pluralism'. If power is unavoidable, the political programme becomes one in which power is reconceived to become more compatible with democratic values. However it also recognises that the system that would emerge from this basis would be imperfect, that is, that there is no political system that can provide an ideal method of reconciling power and democracy. Thus the former is always likely to compromise the latter. In this sense there is no precise definitive form of democracy, although we can still argue whether societies are more or less democratic. For Mouffe, antagonism and hostility are inescapable in social relations characterised by diversity, and the role of politics is not to establish a democratic consensus or rationality - she regards this as impossible - but to find ways in which we accept difference but don't regard those different from us as adversaries. Thus others with alternative views should be treated as 'legitimate opponents'; they have just as much right to hold to their own rationalisation of the world as we have. This involves a commitment to allow others to express their values in the public sphere (as long as they, too, are committed to such an expression on the part of others). Furthermore, it suggests that everyone must be aware that their own rationality will not always prevail.

Mouffe's argument relies upon the political transformation of the antagonism that will always arise from incommensurable value pluralism into 'agonism'. Here she suggests that antagonism constitutes relations between enemies, whereas agonism refers to disagreements between legitimate adversaries. The system she envisages, then, seeks to channel antagonism into a recognition of the value of disagreement to democracy:

"The ideal of a pluralist democracy cannot be to reach a rational consensus in the public sphere. Such a consensus cannot exist. We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion. The idea that power could be dissolved through a rational debate and that legitimacy could be based on pure rationality are illusions which can endanger democratic institutions."

(Mouffe 2000b: 104)

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- Conclusion: A Political Programme? -

Critics might justifiably ask where all of this leaves us. The radical democratic model and the radical view of community do not provide us with an ideal type of the kind of political arrangements that such theoretical perspectives favour. This is a reasonable criticism, but there is no reason why this position is inherently weaker than those that present universal models of procedural justice or communicative rationality. The strength of radical democracy lies in the recognition that the practicalities of the real world are not reflected in more orthodox perspectives. The greatest weakness of political communitarianism is its failure to recognise that the 'community' that it constructs as the key agent of the cohesive society is a fallacy. Imposing homogeneity or universal theories of rationality detaches the political commentator from the realities of pluralist societies. The radical model doesn't provide clear answers to the problems of organising diverse societies or the limitations of liberal democracy, but perhaps that is because those answers do not exist.

Lest it be argued that the position outlined here results in a mélange of relativism, we should be clear about the radical approach to community and its implications for democratic politics. It is intensely political. It wants to spread the expression of different perspectives in the public sphere. It does not see diversity as a private issue but wants to open up the public sphere to an ever increasing set of political perspectives. It is a recipe for a participatory politics, but in the sense that we need to open up more avenues for political expression - politics is not merely about making decisions but about a real process of deliberation in which the agreement of all is unlikely. This, it is suggested, would be facilitated by a recognition that participation in the public sphere is not currently assisted by social and economic provisions in most Western liberal democracies. The argument constructed here implies that we need to encourage and enable people to participate in their communities and to bring their perspective to the negotiating table. The reality is that such negotiation will sometimes reap rewards but at times it will not. In some cases a dilution of principles through compromise will be the result of negotiation, in others values will be so incommensurable that such a compromise is impossible.

Following this model, it is clear that the appropriate political arrangements themselves will be a source of conflict and a process of negotiation. They will not be perfect whatever arrangements can be agreed upon, but they will be subject to change through continual, ongoing engagement of
adversaries. It may well be true that the arrangements that emerge will represent the wishes and interests of powerful groups in society, as is the case today. However, the radical communitarian politics examined in this book suggest different ways of empowering different groups in society. By recognising the impossibility of constructing a political system without reference to social and economic power differentials, the radical theory of community attempts to facilitate challenges to the dominant hegemonic political order. Certainly it does not provide all of the answers to the many difficult questions we face, but it does envisage a political process towards change that is arguably more grounded in reality than either liberal universalism or orthodox political communitarianism.

Chapter 8

Pluralism, Community and Civil Society

The democratic renewal of liberal democracies has become a commonplace theme in contemporary political theory. This suggests that there is a widely held view that there is some kind of democratic deficit in advanced capitalist societies. Moreover it reflects an acceptance of the need to rethink political structures to meet the requirements of an increasingly complex world. In this context there has been a new awakening of interest in the idea of civil society. Communities often feature in civil society theories insofar as the latter are frequently concerned with ways in which groups and associations co-exist in the conditions of pluralism and diversity. Because civil society theory focuses on the sphere of life beyond the reach of the state and the private domain of the individual, it is not surprising that discourses on community might emerge within it. However, the existence of communities within civil society is often implicit, and they are rarely differentiated from other types of group or association. In this sense the utility of civil society for the advancement of community needs to be examined. This chapter explains how the theory of civil society has evolved in recent years and the ways in which, despite its potential as a source of furthering community, it also throws up obstacles to the realisation of community.

The impetus for the re-emergence of the idea of civil society in contemporary politics emanates from the failure of state socialism as practised in former communist regimes on one hand and the problems that have become evident in the market-driven experiments in some Western countries since the 1980s on the other. Nonetheless there has been little agreement regarding how the process of democratisation might manifest itself. However, one common theme has been the focus on civil society as the social sphere in which political renewal might take place (see, for example, Hall
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