

Re-thinking the media's duties to democracy: watchdog, information and representation

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Short title: Re-thinking media duties to democracy

*To talk without polemic or misunderstanding about the relationship between the new technologies and democracy, we need to ask these key questions: Which technologies? And indeed, which democracy?
(Barber 2003)*

The purpose of this article, to paraphrase Benjamin Barber, is to ask: which democracy, which media? It will focus in particular on the democratic side of the question: what does democracy, in theory, require from media? It will ask of the main schools of modern democracy, namely competitive elitism, pluralism, the New Right and participatory democracy: what do they say about the media, what obligations they require of the media and what criteria do they establish for the evaluation of media performance?

What sounds like a straightforward examination turns out to be a treasure hunt; a task of discovering inferences and piecing together the evidence. The seminal texts tease us with clues, but they scarcely supply elaborated answers. As surprising as it is true, the great works of modern political theory concentrate on democracy 'without ever centering on the media' (Schudson, 1996:205). The media emerge, if at all, as formless carriers of abstractions and general principles: the manifestation of freedom of speech, or the circulators of information, the platform for public agendas. The media as institutions, as practices and processes are more or less unexplored, effectively taken for granted. The big questions of democratic theory, justice, liberty, accountability and so on, do not lead researchers to the media.

By contrast, acres of media research assert without fear of contradiction that the media are of central importance to democracy. One can lose count of the works media scholarship that begin with something like the sentence that opens Bennett and Entman's edited collection Mediated Politics (2001:1): 'Mediated political communication has become central to politics and public life in contemporary democracies'. It seems axiomatic: the existence of a free, robust and accurate press is essential for democratic society. It is the life force of democracy, its enabler, its watchdog, guarantor and symbol. Equally, a dysfunctional press may be disabling. Indeed much, maybe most, media research argues precisely this, that media are 'out of order' (Patterson, 1993) at the very least contributors to what is commonly referred to as a crisis of democracy. There is a 'symmetry of taken-for-grantedness' at the level of theory (Scammell and Semetko, 2000: xii). Democratic theory assumes an over-simple transmission model of the media, while media studies take for granted an equally over-simple model of democracy. This point is increasingly acknowledged by media scholars: that too much media research relies on outmoded and unrealistic ideas of democracy (Schudson, 2003; Gans, 2003; Curran 1996; Patterson, 1993; Zaller, 2003; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Those ideas are frequently summarized as 'classic liberalism'; a term more often implicitly understood rather than explicitly formulated. Classic liberalism is not a single clear concept. Held (1996), for example, distinguishes between the 'developmental' and 'protective' strands of liberal democracy. However, within media scholarship, it refers approximately to a selection of the architects of modern democracy in the US and Europe, commonly John Stuart Mill and the founding fathers; the champions of liberty of the press as the cornerstone of democracy. The legacy of the classics has been hotly disputed among the competing schools of 20th century democratic thought; it is often the point at issue in arguments about modern democracy (see below). However, much media criticism proceeds in almost oblivious fashion to these arguments and to the fact that 20th Century thinkers, pluralists, elite and participatory theorists have presented powerful critiques of the continuing relevance of the classic model.

Siebert et al.'s (1956) influential Four Theories of the Press codified the classic elements thus: a privately owned press, operating in a free market, whose chief purposes were to inform, entertain and above all, to discover the truth and act as a check on government power. These two latter duties follow logically from classic liberalism's over-riding concern with the prevention

of tyranny and its insistence on freedom of speech, both as defense against despotism and for the attainment of truth through unrestricted public discussion. The 20th century liberal democratic variant was labeled by Siebert et al as the 'social responsibility' model. Arising out of the 1947 US Commission on the Freedom of the Press and the growth of professionalism in journalism, social responsibility modified the classic (libertarian) core with media duties to provide fair, accurate and important information and a forum for expression that represents of all groups in society. Press freedom became tempered with the idea of self-imposed responsibility: should the market fail to deliver these obligations, government intervention may be justified.

Although much-criticized (e.g. Altschull, 1985; McQuail, 1994:123-153; Nerone, 1995), the Four Theories schema has remained a powerful authority in media research. It has 'stalked the landscape of media studies like a horror-movie zombie for decades beyond its natural lifetime' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004:10). Hallin and Mancini's objection is that the democratic model is effectively defined by the classic liberalism-inspired, US-based example and thus is both ideologically-laden and descriptively 'of limited use in understanding the European experience'. James Curran (1996:81) also wants a 'decent funeral' for classic liberalism. His critique provides a valuable route to uncover the various dissatisfactions with its legacy. Curran identifies three duties in particular, which have become elevated to the 'textbook summary' of media tasks:

- Provision of accurate and important information
- Watchdog over the state/government
- Representation of the spectrum of public opinion.

Dissatisfaction with the textbook list may be categorized as disputes about hierarchy; the balance of priority between the three duties, and, more radically, relevance, that the trilogy does not exhaust the list of prime duties in modern society, and that it provokes a mass of research on media performance that is simply not relevant to democracy in practice.

Hierarchy, the 'battle of prime duties': The battle crystallized in the 1980s and 1990s' debates about the deregulation of broadcasting markets, amid the growth of cable, satellite and digital technology. It was broadly a debate between two of the prime duties: watchdog and representation. Curran (1996) objected to the way that the watchdog role was, for political purposes in part, elevated to the prime duty of media. Watchdog, he noted, 'is said to override all other functions of the media and to dictate the form in which the media should be organized' (Curran, 1996:83). It meant effectively defining 'liberty' as freedom from government restraint or regulation. This view had become almost the new consensus in the US (Kelley and Donway, 1990; Holmes, 1990; Veljanovski, 1989). Deregulators appealed to the paramount importance of the watchdog role, which necessarily relies upon press freedom, which, in turn, is guaranteed by a free market and the minimum of state interference. The 1980s tide throughout the US and Europe was moving towards deregulation and arguments about the media returned time and again to this state/press relationship. One of the most influential works on democracy and the mass media placed the entire debate within this framework: 'is regulation of the press justified?' (Lichtenberg, 1990).

The US deregulation arguments were echoed in Europe, as Europe too began to grapple with the consequences of the new communications technology. However, strong traditions of public service generated a noticeably different tone. The free market, far from being the best guarantee of a free press, was often perceived as a threat to media quality. Highly-prized features of public service broadcasting, universality of access, commitment to serious and impartial news, educational programming, quality drama and so on, were public 'goods' deserving state protection from the tyranny of the market (Blumler, 1992; Garnham, 1990; Scannell, 1989). In short, researchers were far less willing to accept either that watchdog was the primary role of the media or that the trilogy adequately encompassed media duties in modern society.

The pro-public service camp invoked in their support Habermas's concept of the public sphere (1989). This offers an eloquent theoretical basis for the primacy of the representative role of the press, by placing the formation of rational and critical public opinion at the centre of true democracy. Moreover, the 'ideal' public sphere requires protection from both the state and the market; thus questioning the free market/free press/watchdog equation and more closely approximating the broadly autonomous public service European systems, most notably, the BBC. The key media questions thus shifted from the ideas of press freedom from the state, and became: are the media representative of social groups, do they create a forum where there is a genuine rational public debate, and do they contribute to cultural diversity, on the one hand, and social consensus, on the other.

Relevance: Michael Schudson is one scholar who has drawn us repeatedly to this point: too often our expectations of media depend upon outmoded and partial conceptions of democratic citizenship. However, while Curran placed 'watchdog' as the too-dominant duty in media research, Schudson is impressed by the obsession with information, and the idea of the informed citizen as the cornerstone of democracy. The massive appeal of the internet for media/democracy scholars, he argues, relies on its potential for information abundance. If only information were more complete and more accessible, then democracy might broaden and deepen: 'This is all very well if information is at the heart of mass democracy,' says Schudson. 'But it isn't' (2003: 49). His tracking of citizenship in US history found alternative models that are not information-based. He cites, for example, party democracy and rights-based citizenship, the former a set of affiliations with parties and interest groups, the latter and most modern is 'a form of citizenship nested in strong, jealous rights-based political culture'. The model of the informed and rational citizen is then only one of a number of ideas of citizenship, and may well have less connection with participation than others. He argues: 'My fear is that our use of digital media may be imprisoned by a concept of democracy that is a century old and, even at its inception, was a narrow and partial understanding'. His point is not that information is unimportant. Rather it is that if, as with so much contemporary media criticism, our concern is with a crisis of participation, it makes no sense to imagine that the provision of more abundant and better-quality information will somehow magic a solution.

The urgent point is this: it makes no sense to continue to critique or prescribe on the basis of obsolete or irrelevant models of democracy. The urgency stems not just from concerns with the apparent 'crisis of democracy' in the US and much of Europe, but even more from the need to develop appropriate models of media for emerging, young and post-conflict democracies. It is clear, in the case of the latter, that western emphasis on press freedom and the watchdog role may conflict with other desirable goals for new democracies, such as the establishment of a broad democratic culture, reconciliation and nation-building. 'Openness created cacophony, and the expansion of diversity also created the means by which old hatreds could be publicly expressed.' (O'Neill, 1997:2)

The task in this article is not to add yet more weight to the bulk of media criticism, nor to critique democracy itself. It is to work through key texts of democratic thinking in the 20th Century and to make explicit what roles and duties these theories demand of the media. This is necessarily an exploratory task. It requires first simplifying a vast body of work into the manageable components of just a few influential and internally coherent schools of thought. It necessarily simplifies complexities and avoids internal differences of opinion within particular schools of thought. The trade off between complexity and generalization is one of the typical problems associated with comparative work (see Peters, 1998, for an extended discussion). Second, it requires as a starting point a categorization for democratic thought, and in this it relies upon Held (1996). Following Held, we look at the four most influential 20th schools of democratic theory: competitive elitism, pluralism, legal democracy (the New Right) and participatory models. Third,

it will ask particular questions of the models, and how they relate to the media, on the basis of the core meaning of democracy, the 'rule of the people':

1. How are these theories differentiated according to their views of 'the people': what kind of participation is envisaged for them, what is meant by 'public opinion' and how is this connected to governance?
2. How are rules to be enforced: what is the role of the state?
3. What, if any, direct references are there to the media? If not, what may we infer from the answers to the previous two questions: what are the media's duties in relation to the public and participation; what is the ideal relation of media and state?

Competitive Elitist Democracy

Elite theory has an impressive heritage in political thought, from Plato's The Republic, Machiavelli's The Prince through to early 20th Century 'Italian school' descendants, notably Mosca, Pareto and Michels. Its most durable claim is the inevitable stratification of society, between the rulers and the ruled. Elite theory is often disliked because of its profound pessimism about democratic possibilities, and rejection of the grander liberal and socialist ideals of freedom, equality, popular sovereignty and the realization of human potential. The elitists' answer relies on 'realism': history and social science demonstrate the presence of a ruling class in all political organisms (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987:139). Further, recognition of this unavoidable fact is essential for the establishment of the normatively desirable: that governing should be in the hands of those most fit to rule. The most influential theorists of modern democratic elitism are Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter, but to simplify matters we focus on Schumpeter and his revision of democratic theory (sometimes called 'leadership democracy' or 'competitive elitism'). Schumpeter's Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, (originally 1942), begins from a rejection of what he calls the 'classical doctrine of democracy'. He rejects the idea of democracy as an institutional arrangement for realizing the common good by carrying out the will of the people through their elected representatives. Schumpeter has a strictly limited conception of popular involvement in politics. His chief criticisms centre on 'the will of the people' and the 'common good'. He argued that the classics had overestimated the possibilities of both. There was no such thing as the 'common good' to which all people could agree by force of rational argument: questions of principle were irreconcilable 'because ultimate values and our conceptions of what life and society should be and are beyond mere logic' (Schumpeter 1942:251). The will of the people also disappears in the sense of a common will gravitating towards a common goal. If the 'will of the people' was to command respect, it required a level of knowledge and rational ability in individual human beings that simply did not exist among the masses. In reality the will of the people was little more than 'an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions' (p253).

Schumpeter reverses the order of classical liberal theory in which the people elect representatives who then give effect to the will of the people. The role of the people is to produce a government that takes it upon itself to establish the common good. Democracy becomes merely an arrangement for arriving at political decisions, in which leaders acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's votes. Democracy, in short, becomes a method for the periodic and peaceful transfer of government between two or more groups of leaders. The most that can be expected of democracy is that it may choose the most competent leaders and provide mechanisms for controlling their excesses. According to Schumpeter this greatly improves the theory of the democratic process, emphasizing the importance of leadership, which was neglected in classic theory. It emphasizes also that the method of competition for leadership is crucial to democracy: it must be generally accepted as fair, if not perfect, and in principle everyone is free to compete for leadership. Democracy's commitment to freedom is contained in

the latter principle, and this in turn requires considerable freedom of discussion, which in turn requires commitments to freedom of speech and the press.

The state in democratic elitism is defined most clearly in Weber's famous formulation as a compulsory organization which has the monopoly of legitimate force within a given territory. In increasingly complex industrial democracies, the state relies for its public administration on the bureaucracy: the skilled strata of trained experts, who effectively embody the state. Ideally conceived this is a corps of rule-bound public administrators, skilled and always faithful to their elected political masters, as government changes hands. However, in practice the bureaucracy can develop its own autonomous interest and potentially despotic powers. Such dangers were to be contained by the constitutions of parliamentary government, strong executives, and through competition between political elites, and between public and private bureaucracies, the latter anchored in free markets. Legitimacy of democracies was ensured by mass participation in regular elections and by general acceptance of a liberal culture, which encourages party competition and is tolerant of a broad range of opinion.

By common consent, Schumpeter's democratic elitism became extraordinarily influential. It helped provide clear ways of differentiating 'real' democracies (in the US and Europe) from false claims (Soviet Union/China). The theory chimed with empirical studies that showed that the classic picture of democratic man was hopelessly unrealistic: in reality most citizens, especially the low classes, were politically inactive, ignorant and uninterested (Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960). Subsequent studies have supported this dismal finding; despite improvements in education the proportion of political 'know-nothings' in the US has remained obstinately high (Bennett, 1988 Delli Carpini, 1996). Schumpeter's theory helps explain how a system, in which people fall well below the 'informed citizen' requirements of classical democracy, can in practice work successfully as a stable political democracy. The experiences of Europe's totalitarian states, with their mobilization of populations, suggested further that mass participation might itself present a threat to democracy. A common view of much modern 'realistic' democratic theory was precisely that limited participation may have positive functions for the system as a whole, 'by cushioning the shock of disagreement, adjustment and change' (Pateman 1970:7).

Competitive Elitism and the Media

There is an explicit commitment to freedom of the press, as an expression of the principle of freedom of speech. The need for reliable information is equally evident, the democratic 'method' unable to work without it. However, it is less clear how Schumpeter stands in relation to the duty of watchdog, overseeing the state and government. Arguably, this task is important for competitive elitism, since the entire theory can be defined as the reduction of the liberal case for democracy to mechanisms for the prevention of tyranny. This would seem to urge a watchdog role upon the press. However, the state itself is staffed by a trained bureaucracy, controlled by strong parliamentary systems. It is certainly not clear that the state is the main threat to liberty, nor therefore that watchdog can be the prime duty. The third main task of media in liberal democracy, the representation of public opinion, is also less than straightforward. There is a commitment to a culture tolerant of differences of opinion and in that respect media might be expected to reflect the range of opinion. However, there is far less deference to the concept of public opinion per se. Schumpeter rejects the possibility of the creation of a genuinely rational public opinion united around a common goal. The great mass of the electorate is not capable of independent rational debate, and in practice the 'popular will' is a thing to be feared and manipulated more than acted upon.

Although there is no explicit statement to this effect in his key work (Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy), one might imagine that Schumpeter would have anticipated that the media would develop as it actually has in many democratic societies: separating between the relatively low-

circulation information-dense 'elite' press and the mass circulation entertainment-dominated tabloids, including 'tabloid' TV. Perhaps, the more that entertainment dominates the latter, the better. After all, the political content of the mass-circulation press often tends towards the anti-democratic, irrational and authoritarian on such matters as race, sexuality, immigration, and so on.

Distinctively, and much at odds with later theories such as participatory democracy, Schumpeter prizes the role of propaganda. He views propaganda, not in the now-common derogatory sense, but as a necessary means to influence people's actions and opinions in a definite direction. Propaganda, the 'psycho-technics' of electioneering (advertising, slogans, stirring music etc) were essential to motivate the masses in the competitive struggle between parties (272-283). Political leaders compete, much as business competes for customers, in much the same way and with much the same means to engage interest and enthusiasm. Schumpeter's likening of party competition to business, and his insistence on the necessity of emotional campaigning to mobilize voters, marks him out as both a predictor and theoretical forerunner for the now burgeoning study of political marketing.

Schumpeter was not concerned with questions of media power. However, this is a source of near-alarm for modern descendants (e.g., Sartori, 1987). Media power to select, magnify issues and shape public opinion, thereby indirectly influencing party behavior has potentially destructive effects on leadership. Media was a key contributor to the 'governing crisis' of the 1970s (Crozier et al., 1975), in which clamorous activism for worker, civil and women's rights threatened to stretch government to breaking point. 'Overload' fears calmed in the 1980s and 1990s, but anxieties arose, about the affect of media-centered political marketing on the quality of leadership. As party memberships and partisan identifications weakened, so power was seen to shift worryingly to the media. Candidates for leadership were selected increasingly for their media-centric, personable and star qualities, rather than their political skills and competence. The election of Hollywood heroes, notably Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger, was the logical outcome of this process. Media's impact on leadership has become a prime concern in modern political communication research, reflecting the continued strength of elite theory in political science. The key question is expressed well in Iyengar and Reeves' (1997) volume, Do the Media Govern? Concern with the influence of media has extended beyond campaigns and the selection of leaders to governance itself; what discretionary powers do the media, and by extension media-impacted public opinion, have on policy formation? This is seen most urgently in research in the 'CNN effect', and the fear that expansion of live, 24-hour news has accelerated, at times maybe even, directed the course of foreign policy and military intervention.

Pluralism

The pluralists, also called the 'empirical democratic theorists', were strongly influenced by competitive elitism. They accepted that democracy in practice fell far short of the participatory citizenship envisaged by Rousseau or Marx. They too were concerned with real workings of democracy, developing a 'descriptive method', which identifies the characteristics of societies, accepted as democratic by social scientists, as distinct from totalitarian societies. However, they sought to remedy what they considered a central weakness in competitive elitism. The citizen, in Schumpeter's account, exists as an isolated and vulnerable individual in a world where real politics is conducted by competitive elites. For pluralists, this ignored the activity of thousands of intermediary groups from community associations to trade unions. Pluralists, especially Robert Dahl on whom we focus, emphasized the dynamics of group politics (pressure groups and interest groups) and argued that modern democracy was both more competitive and more satisfactory to all parties than Schumpeter's pessimistic model.

Dahl's Preface to Democratic Theory (1956: 132-4) described the 'American Hybrid' of democracy as polyarchy. Its key features were: competition among diverse interest groups which are all,

more or less equally, able to pursue their goals; government by minorities, in that specific policies typically reflect minority preferences; at the same time competition guarantees political liberty and obstructs the growth of excessively powerful minorities. Polyarchy is underpinned by constitutional factors, such as regular elections, citizenship rights of voting, freedom of expression and organization, and a system of checks and balances between the legislature, executive, judiciary and administrative bureaucracy. The constitution itself, although important, is less important than a supportive political culture of moderation, tolerance and consensus on the fundamental democratic values.

Classic pluralism largely dissolved into competing schools of thought, under the weight of criticism from elite, New Right and Marxist theorists over the 1960s and 1970s. However, its core values remain strong in the work of neo-pluralism's most influential exponents, Dahl and Charles Lindblom. While admitting the force of criticisms, they, especially Dahl, became, if anything, even more robust defenders of the basic principles of pluralist democracy. From elite theory, they accepted that a tendency towards minority domination was inevitable (Dahl, 1989:265-79). From the New Right they accepted that there were strong links between democracy and the free market; all existing polyarchal systems were market-oriented. From Marxism, they accepted that modern capitalism systematically privileges corporate business interests. Further, that this created inequalities that undermined democracy and threatened its very existence. The polyarchy of classic pluralism was, in modern practice, seriously 'deformed'. Yet, pluralism was essential for democracy. Moreover, pluralist democracy (a term interchangeable with polyarchy), even in its deformed state, remained preferable to all real-world alternatives. So far no country has reached a higher stage of democracy than that in the actually existing polyarchies of Europe and the USA, according to Dahl (1989:223); the 'jaded' critics of polyarchy fail to realize just how desirable it seems to outsiders, deprived of even the limited rights and freedoms guaranteed in polyarchies.

Both Dahl and Lindblom, in the latter's *Politics and Markets* (1977), accept the Marxist view that corporate business interests were privileged within the key mechanisms for controlling governments, most importantly the market and party politics (Lindblom, 1977:199-200). Moreover, Lindblom argued, business uses its privileged resources to 'indoctrinate' citizens: to associate private enterprise with political democracy, so that any attempt by government to threaten the prosperity and autonomy of private business is deemed to be an attack on democracy itself.

'Indoctrination' figured in Dahl's 1956 account of pluralism as a benign concept, the public spirited 'social training' of citizens to accept the apparently conflicting but desirable democratic values of popular sovereignty and protection of minorities. Within neo-pluralism, 'indoctrination' becomes a more suspicious beast. Lindblom, in particular, emphasizes the importance of persuasion as a key method of social control in modern society. 'Indoctrination', roughly a combination of propaganda and education, is a key means by which corporate business maintains its privileges. Business, via advertising, ownership and privileged access to media, transmits a consistent message entwining private enterprise with democracy. The purpose of this, according to Lindblom, is not so much to persuade citizens, as to induce silence: to effectively remove 'grand issues' from politics (1977:204-207). Grand issues, such as, the importance of private enterprise, corporate autonomy, protection of the status quo of wealth and income, restriction of trade union demands to those consistent with profitability, effectively become non-issues. Corporate political persuasion on these grand issues asks little of the citizen, ordinarily only that the citizen do nothing.

Neo-pluralism and the media

Neo-pluralism is unusual in that its theorists address directly questions of media. The media are important, negatively, because of their use as channels of indoctrination, and positively, because communications technology are prized as key resources which should be deliberately developed

'on behalf of democracy' in order to promote the knowledge and enable effective political participation (Dahl, 1989:338-9).

Two striking assumptions about media are clear in the work of especially of Lindblom. First that the media are powerful and are capable of impressive influence over public opinion. This is really an assumption. There is no consideration of how audiences are influenced, how they may receive and may negotiate meaning in media texts. Lindblom devotes less than two pages to questions of media effects (1977:206-7), offering an abrupt dismissal of 'limited effects', the then predominant paradigm of media effects research. Second, that the media are considered as ciphers of information. There are parallels here with the pluralist conception of the state. Dunleavy and O'Leary (1987) identify three pluralist models of the state: the cipher or the weathervane state, the neutral state and the broker state. The cipher state is a 'passive vehicle through which inputs are processed. It simply mirrors or responds to the balance of pressure group forces in civil society' (p43). The neutral state is the state as a kind of umpire, which referees in the public interest contests among groups. The broker model posits the state as an interested middleman; 'The broker is constrained by clients, but is more autonomous than a cipher or mere functionary...' (p47), and is more self-interested than the neutral referee. Theoretically, only one of these, the broker state, requires the media function of watchdog against the state per se. On the contrary, the watchdog function logically exists with regard to powerful interest groups, not the state, and theoretically a neutral 'referee' state, acting in the public interest, can assist performance of this media duty through regulation or direct help.

Pluralist theory then seems far more sympathetic to the mixed public service broadcast/private press models of Europe than to the free market dominated model of the US. For Lindblom especially, the media appear like the weathervane/cipher state, skewed by powerful interest groups, particularly corporate capitalism. Thus media reflect and transmit the social and political balance of power and, for Lindblom especially, are used as influential agents of corporate propaganda. While there are clear theoretical requirements of media to provide information, to represent the spectrum of opinion and guard against the power of over-privileged interest groups, ironically, these requirements become more urgent precisely to the extent that the media's practical capacity to fulfill them is reduced. Media performance falls short precisely to the extent that society is distorted in relation to the ideal of classic pluralism. In practice, therefore, the media do not carry the spectrum of opinion, nor supply adequate information, nor keep watch over threatening accumulations of power.

The neo-pluralist critique chimes with media criticism, especially from political economy schools. The distorting effects of media dependency on corporate capitalism are emphasized by authors such as Robert McChesney (2000), with his critique of 'rich media, poor democracy', and how the 'corporate media system' undermines democracy. For Ben Bagdikian (1985) the pluralist protections of competition are being swept away through concentration of media ownership, such that US media resembles less a 'supermarket of ideas' and more an assembly line of narrow and homogenous content. Most radically Herman and Chomsky's ever-alluring 'propaganda model' (1988) describes media functions in terms remarkably close to Lindblom's view of corporate power to control and remove 'grand issues' from the public agenda.

The New Right

The 'New Right', often buttressed by libertarianism, is critical both of pluralist theory and the actual practice of democracy in the west. It rejects the pursuit of equality and it challenges the pluralism of Dahl and Lindblom in two fundamental respects: the question of natural rights and the importance of the free market. The New Right, exemplified by its commanding figure, Friedrich Hayek, elevates the principle of individual liberty to the prime goal of politics. Dahl, by contrast, argues that there are no natural human rights existing prior to democracy (1956?). Democracy, that is self-determination, is itself the goal of politics and individual rights flow from

it and are guaranteed by it. The New Right and Hayek, however, returns to the 19th century philosophy of classic liberalism to reclaim the principle of natural right. Individual liberty is the prime and prior right and democracy is preferable to other political systems only to the extent that it capable of protecting freedom. Hayek makes the point explicitly:

'It may well be that our generation talks and thinks too much of democracy and too little of the values which it serves...Democracy is essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom. As such it is by no means infallible or certain. Nor must we forget that there has often been much more cultural and spiritual freedom under autocratic rule than under some democracies...' (Hayek, 1944:52).

Fundamentally, the project of the New Right has been 'to advance the cause of "liberalism" against "democracy" by limiting the democratic use of state power' (Held, 1996:254). Hayek makes plain that he wishes to restore the liberal definition of liberty: freedom from coercion (Hayek, 1944:19). 'Socialist freedom', Hayek argued, was in reality not concerned at all with freedom in the liberal sense of the word, but was merely a new label for the old demand of equal distribution of wealth and power. It is essential for Hayek that liberty be recognized as an individual right. Societies are simply aggregates of individuals. This view does not exclude what Hayek calls 'social ends', that is 'the coincidence of individual ends which makes it advisable for men to combine in their pursuit' (Hayek, 1944:44). But group power to enforce 'social ends' must be strictly confined by voluntary agreement: when the state undertakes direct control where there is no such agreement it is bound to suppress individual freedom (p45). Voluntary associations, still less involuntary associations such as the state, do not acquire a new and powerful class of group rights merely by virtue of being a group. Ultimately, then, the only state that is compatible with liberty is the 'minimal state': severely limited to the narrow functions of protection of life, liberty and estate.

The primacy of liberalism over democracy is reflected in the constitutional arrangements favored by Hayek. Liberalism 'is a doctrine about what the law ought to be, democracy a doctrine about the manner of determining what will be the law (Hayek, 1960:103). The actions of majorities and governments, therefore, must be constrained by a legal framework which enshrines liberalism, and prevents democracy from becoming the tyranny of the majority. The potential tyrannical power of states and governments could be contained only if the broader Rule of Law was respected. This is why Held refers sometimes to the New Right as 'legal democracy'.

For Hayek individual liberty is best ensured by the free market. The 'invisible hand' of free markets enables optimum distribution of resources according to individual decisions with minimum need for central direction and coercion. He does not claim that the market ensures perfect, still less, equal distribution. It is rather that the 'blind justice' of the market, in which distribution is at least partly dependent on the ability of the people concerned, is significantly superior to the alternative of a planned economy where 'it is the will of a few persons that decides who will get what' (Hayek, 1944: 76). Hayek accepts that there may be a strong case for reducing inequality of opportunity provided that such planning does not interfere with the impersonal workings of the market. His concession, however, stops well short of the kind of redistributive state favored by the neo-pluralists.

The New Right, Libertarianism and the Media

A return to classic liberal principles logically suggests a model of media of classic liberal proportions: a free press, founded on freedom of speech and private ownership, acting crucially as a watchdog against the state, providing information and representing the spectrum of public opinion via the 'invisible hand' of the market. The watchdog function should be the prime one theoretically, since the state offers the major threat to individual liberty. Representation of opinion is less a goal, more a by-product of consumer sovereignty.

Hayek does not address questions of the media directly, but he reflects upon public opinion in a chapter devoted to totalitarian propaganda and the 'end of truth'. Propaganda was not peculiar to totalitarian states. What was unique was the totalitarian monopoly of propaganda and its moral consequences, which were destructive of all morals because it undermines the foundation of all morals: respect for truth. Hayek connects clearly with elitist thinking in his discussion of propaganda (1944:122). It was plain, for him, that most people were not capable of independent thought and were easily manipulated. Freedom of speech and the prevention of monopoly of propaganda were important, not because in some utopian way everybody may be able to write or think anything, but that somebody may advance any cause or idea.

The New Right was influential in shaping policy over the last 25 years. Reaganite and Thatcherite programs of rolling back the state, privatization and deregulation of markets have been emulated to greater or lesser degrees throughout much of the democratic world. New Right thinking had clear influence in media policy: leading to the suspension of the 'Fairness Doctrine' in the US in 1987 and the 1990 Broadcasting Act in Britain, which intended to pave the way for a more competitive television market. The coupling of ideas of individual liberty with free markets was a powerful political cocktail. It was a shock in Europe, and perhaps especially the UK, where Thatcher set out to dismantle the 'comfortable duopoly' of the publicly-funded BBC and the private commercial television channel, with its monopoly of advertising revenue. The UK system, far from being a model of citizen-serving media, was in the Thatcherite view, the epitome of restrictive practices. It was effectively censorship; benign maybe, but censorship nonetheless. The express purpose of the Peacock Commission, a 1980s review of British broadcasting, was to seek to move tightly-regulated television to a model much closer to newspapers, where 'freedom of speech' and consumer sovereignty were the regulatory principles. Thus, started the intense debate (Blumler, 1992; Scannell, 1989; Valjanovski, 1989) about the value of public service, and the importance of protections of media from market forces. It led, as outlined in the introduction, to the battle over the hierarchy of media duties: the idea of the media as watchdog, and necessarily independent from the state, versus representation and other desirable goals, such as media quality, and protection of national cultures.

Participatory Democracy: The New Left

We focus on the work of two of the New Left's leading thinkers, Carole Pateman and C.B. Macpherson. The influence of Marxism is clear: in common with Marxism, they reject the pluralist conception of the state as a neutral apparatus, a kind of 'umpire'. The state is inescapably enmeshed in the maintenance and reproduction of the inequalities of everyday life (Held, 1996: 265). However, in opposition to Marxism, they accept the vital importance of institutions of representative democracy. Generally, the participationists are probably closer to the neo-pluralism of Dahl than to Marxism: democrats first, and social egalitarians second. Their distinctive contribution is the rekindling of interest in the emphasis on participation in classic thinkers, especially John Stuart Mill, Rousseau and Jefferson.

The New Left's participatory democracy emerged as the main counter-model to the New Right (Held, 1996:264). However, Pateman's project began as a critique of modern pluralist and elite theory, what she calls the 'contemporary model' of democracy. Pateman's Participation and Democratic Theory (1970) argued that the 'contemporary model', reflecting the influence of Schumpeter, was excessively afraid of the dangers of popular active participation. While expressing some concern with voter apathy, it offered no account for it, and instead located the major threat to modern democracy in 'mediocrity and the danger that it might destroy its own leaders' (1970:10-11). Pateman and later, Macpherson (1973), argued that the 'contemporary model' had abandoned a central tenet of the classics: the insistence on participation. For the New Left, the concept of participation is clearly differentiated from the far more limited pluralist concerns to increase voter engagement with politics. Pateman argues that the pluralists' concern

is essentially with stability: that is, participation is necessary only to the extent that it is sufficient to ensure the legitimacy and stability of the democratic system as a whole. For 'participationists', however, participation is itself a goal. Democratic politics, properly conceived, is about self-development of citizens. Held (1996: 267-8) summaries the benefits of participation thus: it 'fosters human development, enhances a sense of political efficacy, reduces estrangement from power centers, nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of an active and knowledgeable citizenry...'. Participationists dispute the 'realist' assumptions of elite and pluralist theory; not that the actual levels of knowledge and participation are low, but that they must always be low, and that such low levels are compatible with genuine democracy.

This pessimistic 'realism' ignores the importance placed on education by the classics of democratic theory. Pateman emphatically differentiates the concept of education from that of the 'social training' of the pluralists. The former is liberating and concerned with the fulfillment of individual potential. The latter is concerned with stabilization: 'socialization is the process which encourages individuals to accept the liberal democratic state, and their place within it, as rational and necessary, as "natural"' (Pateman, 1985:178). Participation is educative rather than 'socialising'.

The New Left generally advance two routes to increased participation. First, to make more open and accountable the institutions of politics; parliaments, state bureaucracies and political parties. Second, the encouragement of new forms of alternative and local-level activity, for example, workplace democracy, women's groups, ecological movements and community politics. Macpherson argues for a democratization of the party system: 'participatory parties' acting according to the principles of direct democracy, competing within parliamentary structures, complemented by workplace and community direct democracy (Held, 1996:267).

Pateman's solutions concede more to elite and pluralist theory. She argues that participation is correlated clearly with equality and distributive justice. Empirical evidence demonstrates links between low socio-economic status and political apathy (Pateman, 1970: 104). A key problem therefore for modern democratic society is redistribution of resources. Pateman also seeks more direct democracy at local and workplace levels. Drawing lessons from Almond and Verba's (1963) The Civic Culture, she claims that individual feelings of political competence are related to propensity to participate. The more people believe they can make a difference, the more likely are they to participate. In practice people are most knowledgeable of those issues which immediately touch their lives. One might expect then a far higher degree of active participation within communities and at the workplace than in the more distant issues of national politics. Pateman concedes to the elitists that in modern mass democracy active national participation for most people will be limited to voting in elections. However, the encouragement of extensive participation at the workplace and local level would radically alter the context of national politics (Held, 1996:269). It would foster a climate of participation and offer greatly increased learning opportunities about national issues: citizens therefore, would be better equipped to judge national issues and the performance of national representatives.

Participatory Democracy and the Media

Once again, the media is considered directly scarcely at all in these works, not at all by Macpherson. One may assume commitment to freedom of expression based on general acceptance of liberal democratic rights. However, this is an assumption. There is no direct reference to freedom of the press in either Pateman's or Macpherson's founding works. Pateman, however, stresses the importance of information and seeks fluid and open flows of information, sideways and upwards as well as downwards. One might expect therefore that the informational duties of the media are especially important to these theories. One might assume too that participationists would seek a proliferation of new media, related to communities, workplaces and direct political activity generally. Given, their general endorsement of state intervention in the

redistribution of resources, it would not stretch the point to imagine a participatory society in which these new media might be supported directly and indirectly by the state. State regulation of media content, perhaps in requirements for fairness, accuracy and balance, also seems in keeping with this view. It is no coincidence that the strongest advocates for the retention of public service obligations in broadcasting tend to come from the Left. It is clear that the New Left cannot be satisfied, as are the New Right, with an entirely market-dominated media system. We have then a picture of a mixed market of media, with private and state-supported press competing for audiences, under broad regulatory regime that protects freedom of information together with professional journalistic obligations to fairness and accuracy. Almost exactly this type of system is advocated by Curran in his proposal for a working model of democratic media (Curran, 1996: 105-112).

The watchdog role for the press theoretically exists, but is complicated. The state is both a threat, implicated in the maintenance and reinforcement of unequal relations of power, and a potential salvation, essential for redistribution. It follows, therefore, that while there maybe some watchdog role, it cannot be the unequivocal number one duty of the press. Moreover, the watchdog function would seem of necessity to be drawn more broadly to cover not simply the state and governments but powerful private interests also.

It is surely not coincidental that, of all the theories of democracy, the New Left places greatest emphasis on information and education. This is because it, emphatically more than the others, refuses to accept that the way we are is a true statement of human nature. Political apathy and ignorance are faults, less of human frailties and more of capitalist-based democracies themselves. Capitalism connives at and conspires to keep citizens active participation to the minimum need for social stability. At root, democracy must encompass more than merely negative protections against tyranny. It should be an 'improving' enabling system, premised upon a belief that given the appropriate conditions human behavior can and will develop its true potential.

Participatory Democracy: Deliberative Democracy

The stress on participation as deliberative communication or dialogue is the main distinction with earlier theories of participatory democracy. Deliberative democracy 'represents an exciting development in political theory' (Bohman and Rehg, 1997:ix): it reclaims the classic idea that democratic government should embody the will of the people, and says in essence that legitimate lawmaking results from the public deliberation of citizens. It rejects Schumpeter's elitism that there is no such thing as a common will, and that public is not capable of rationality. On the contrary, deliberative theorists argue that democratic legitimacy depends precisely on a rational consensus of public opinion. The deliberative democracy espoused by Habermas, inspired by Hannah Arendt and Rousseau's republicanism, is the best known of these theories. For Habermas, citizen status should mean more than the protection of private rights, as in the classic liberal model. It should include a commitment to democratic processes that ensure that people more or less directly are the authors of the laws that govern them. This means a 'guarantee of an inclusive opinion- and will-formation in which free and equal citizens reach an understanding on which goals and norms lie in the equal interest of all' (Habermas, 1996:22).

Habermas's version of deliberative democracy, of a public in continuous, rational, deliberation about its own governance, has had a huge impact on media scholarship. This is not surprising because, distinctively, the public sphere places communication at its core. Moreover, the idea of a broad public, engaged in collective discussion, immediately suggests real tasks for the media and opportunities for critique of media content. To what extent do the media open up socially inclusive space for rational public discussion? To what extent do they seek to foster mutual understanding? To what extent do they promote conflict or substitute reason with sensationalism? How do the proliferating radio/TV talk shows measure up to the ideal, and which

media system, public or private, best assists the public sphere? By contrast, it is much more difficult to derive such precise media tasks from any of the other theories. Deliberative democracy depicts the media as powerful agents of the public, capable of helping to build or destroy reasonable social consensus (Rosen, 1991, 1999). These duties to citizen engagement are presented as the prime democratic obligations of media, overwhelming the classic liberal commitments to free speech and watchdog.

Democracy and the Media: Conclusion

Let us return to the original question: which democracy, which media? We can see that democratic theory does not support unambiguously the 'textbook summary' of prime media democratic duties, watchdog, information and representation. The balance of these duties varies across models, in some cases not there at all; in others different duties are suggested. Both Curran and Schudson are right in significant respects: most modern democratic theory does not support the primacy of the watchdog role; nor is there anything to suggest that provision of better and more abundant information is the answer to increased participation. Let us take these points in turn.

The defining question for the watchdog role concerns conceptions of the state. All theories which see the state as more or less autonomous and self-interested also conceive of it as a major potential source of tyranny, unless checked by countervailing powers: the constitution, political culture, and the media. The watchdog duty with respect to the state is clearly the prime media role for theories which prioritize liberty, and define it in negative terms as freedom from coercion. Of the four schools examined, only the New Right makes such an unequivocal statement. In none of the others is watchdog obviously the top duty. This is true even of competitive elitism, with its over-riding concern for the prevention of tyranny. In fact, modern elitists' concerns are that the media have become too powerful, with potentially destructive effects upon the democratic method, and the quality of leadership. Logically and most radically, theories that conceive of the state as neutral – pluralism – do not require any watchdog role for the media vis-à-vis the state.

The state is more ambivalent within neo-pluralism and participatory democracy. It is implicated as a potential threat to democracy (as the instrument of powerful economic interests) and as an agent of democratization (enabling redistribution of resources). It follows that a watchdog role exists, because the state is potentially undemocratic, but that it is not unequivocally the prime role. Implicitly, these theories, especially neo-pluralism require that that watchdog role is re-focused, beyond the institutions of state and government to powerful interests, particularly corporate business. Curran therefore is right: one cannot logically continue to claim watchdog over the state as the prime duty unless one accepts the New Right claim that the state is the most potent potential enemy of the people's liberty. The broader question of media's performance as watchdog over the power of non-state interest groups has been a relatively minor research concern, compared to the focus on media coverage of the formal institutions of politics. Media ties with the corporate economy and global capitalism are often acknowledged; problems associated with concentration of media ownership are familiar and often linked to media failures of performance, to adequately represent the spectrum of minority opinion, or to failure to investigate governments. However, it is rarely proposed that media's watchdog duty should be over corporate power rather than the state, although this is one clear reading of Lindblom's telling, but almost neglected, critique of corporate muscle to remove 'grand issues' from the public agenda.

The informational duties of the press are uncontroversial at one level. Surely all democratic theory requires that reliable political information is readily available for citizens. However, Schudson is right to question whether information drives participation, or as he puts it, 'the good citizen'. None of the theories discussed here suggests that. The theories most concerned to

increase participation, neo-pluralism and participatory democracy, seek solutions primarily in economic redistribution, education, constitutional reform, devolution of democracy to workplace and local communities, and so on. Even Habermas's deliberative democracy, which is highly information-dependent, envisages participation as communication between citizens, and emphasizes inclusive public forums that enable rational exchange. The point is made concrete by those followers of Habermas, such as Benjamin Barber and Jay Rosen, who seek to influence media and journalism in practice. Barber's 'strong democracy' requires common public spaces for citizens to think across a variety of perspectives, not simply to access information (Barber, 2003). Rosen's quest, through his promotion of civic (or public) journalism, is precisely to encourage journalists to embrace responsibilities beyond the provision of information, to a practice which supports 'a realm of meaningful public discussion' (Rosen, 1991: 268).

True, neo-pluralism and participatory theories tend more than the others to mention specifically the importance of information. Pateman talks of free and multi-directional flows of information. Dahl (1989:339) urges that communications technology be enlisted on behalf of democracy to ensure that every citizen has access to 'appropriate' levels of information concerning public issues. Information is a necessary condition for citizenship, but alone it is hopelessly insufficient. Schudson is right to condemn the idea that the democratic potential of the internet lies in its information abundance: at the level of theory, never mind practice, there is no automatic causal leap from information to participation.

This leads on to broader discussion of media and democratic participation. Elitism in particular suggests a role for media that is not included in the textbook summary but which it deems functionally essential for democracy. Pippa Norris, who expressly aligns herself to the Schumpeterian tradition, highlights the role of the media as a mobilizing agent. Schumpeter is blunt on this point: eye-catching campaigns are functionally necessary to educate and mobilize, in his view, generally apathetic citizens into the democratic process. He was both describing and advocating the situation that actually existed at the time he was writing, mass member parties supported by a highly partisan press, especially in Europe. Norris (2000:35), in more soothing tones befitting a more de-aligned age, translates his point into a general democratic duty for the media. They 'should' stimulate interest and learning, and encourage civic engagement. For elitism the liberal mantra is not enough: substantial information and a free market place of ideas are not sufficient to ensure citizen participation, at even the most minimal level of voting in elections. Citizens need to be actively mobilized.

The idea of the media as partisan mobilizers is at odds with the ethos of modern US professional journalism, which sees its duty to expose rather than transmit party/candidate propaganda, as witnessed in the trend to 'disdain' and cynical reporting of governments and politicians (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994, 1996). Perhaps from a US perspective, the 'party press' seems an almost throw-back idea compared to the modern creeds of professionalism, objectivity and neutrality from journalists. However, as Hallin and Mancini (2004:296-302) illustrate in their 18-country comparison of media systems, the partisan press is alive and kicking across much of Europe. They note a correlation between strongly market-dominated systems, as in the US and Canada, and a de-aligned, neutral, information-oriented journalism, in which 'watchdog over government' is elevated to the key political duty of media. They suggest, further, that with the advance of global capitalism and market de-regulation there are signs of homogenization in media systems, moving towards the US model. One consequence of this is the weakening of the media's party political ties. It would be too simplistic to suggest a direct causal link between media systems, characterized by a strongly partisan press, and high voter turn out. There are too many other variables in play, not least, the electoral system and regulations (Norris, 2004). However, it is reasonable to suggest that the Schumpeterian idea of mobilization is inherent in a partisan press; it will champion parties and causes and advocate readers' votes in particular

directions. A neutral press must consider if mobilization is any proper part at all of the objective journalist's role; if so it must find new ways to mobilize.

Pluralism does not talk directly about mobilization, but it sees a necessity for 'social training', that citizens need to be educated into the 'political culture' of democracy. Dahl's pluralism suggests that journalists' responsibility to democracy is prior to their duty of care for free speech. There are no natural rights existing prior to democracy, in Dahl's view; individual rights flow from democracy and are guaranteed by it. Therefore, responsible journalism should nurture the democratic consensus above all, for without it there are no guaranteed individual rights, including freedom of speech. It is rare in Western journalism to see 'democracy' set so clearly above 'freedom of speech' as a guiding principle. However, this has been the practice especially of public service broadcast systems. The BBC's charter (2004), for example, requires impartiality but expressly states that this does not mean 'detachment from fundamental democratic principles': the BBC is required not to be neutral towards opinions it considers undemocratic. The freedom of speech versus democracy argument may seem redundant in established democracies, where popular commitment to democratic principles have if anything strengthened, even while trust in parties and politicians has declined in recent years. Democracy and freedom of speech are inextricably entwined. However, the argument emerges with urgency in research on post-communist and post-conflict media, where a succession of observers have noted that the expansion of press freedom and an excessive emphasis on 'watchdog' journalism may unsettle the formation of the necessary consensus political culture around democratic norms. In short, the very quest for democracy requires a re-think of the classic duties of liberalism.

This piece claims only to be a contribution to debates that are already taking place about media and democracy. It does not claim to present a new model or a new set of duties. It does not claim, either, to promote any one democratic theory. However, it does support the critics of the classic liberal model; and it does suggest that both criticism of media performance and prescription for journalists' practices would be enlightened by attending to democratic theory.

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