
REVIEWS

Simen Andersen Øyen and Rasmus T. Slaattelid, eds., *Multiple Democracies in Theory and History*. University of Bergen: SVT Press, 2009. Pp. viii + 114. ISBN: 978-82-7907-006-1. 20 Euros.

Is it reasonable to speak of many different forms of democracy, or is it more accurate simply to speak of various forms of political organization? That is, does it make sense to think about how cultural and historical influences would shape democratic impulses into different but still related expressions? Or is there an irreducible and definable essence to the notion of democracy that was first glimpsed in ancient Greece and then flowered in Western civilization? These are the sorts of questions raised by these intriguing essays that were first presented during the “Multiple Democracies” conference sponsored by the University of Bergen and East China Normal University in 2008.

The inspiration for the notion of multiple democracies is the discussion generated by Shmuel Eisenstadt’s notion of multiple modernities. Eisenstadt’s notion stands in contrast to Samuel Huntington’s theory of a clash of civilizations in which Western democracies, rooted in Christian values and energized by a free trade market economy, are opposed by Muslim and other world cultures, an opposition in which common ground is hard to find. In other words, Eisenstadt challenges Huntington’s notion of virtually incommensurable civilizations poised for conflict. Similarly, the idea of multiple democracies can be seen as challenging the view that the Western idea of democracy is the ideal model in terms of which all other political developments are to be judged. Simen Øyen writes that in the discussion of multiple democracies, “alternative sufficient conditions for what constitutes a democracy are replacing the necessary criteria of traditional approaches” (p. 27)

Eisenstadt contributes the first article in the

volume at hand, but his piece does not focus primarily on multiple democracies. Rather he examines the notion of civil society and addresses the question concerning whether it is appropriate to use the term *civil society* to refer to any non-Western social forms. At issue for Eisenstadt is whether civil society is best viewed as comprised of the multiple, often volunteer, largely self-regulating associations and organizations, separate from the state, “in which the ideal of civility, tolerance, non-violent relations, and a message of universal inclusiveness are promulgated” (8). Those are the ideal values in terms of which civil society is often portrayed. Yet for Eisenstadt the reality is often quite different: the various components of civil society are engaged in competing visions of social order. Similar sorts of regulatory adjustments are found within what at first glance seems to be the opposite of the autonomous components of civil society, namely, the Indian caste system. Thus, in quite different sorts of societies there are social forces functionally nearly equivalent to the Western idea of civil society, and when all such forces are strong, and when the state has a strong yet responsive center, society as a whole is healthy and can thrive.

Tong Shijun brings Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, and the Chinese philosopher Feng Qi into the conversation in his brief but illuminating article. Taylor thinks that while a culture’s various religious and metaphysical views may be incompatible, nevertheless, if one focuses on *norms of conduct*, general agreement is possible. Furthermore, these norms strongly impact behavior only if they are deeply embedded in a culture that recognizes the worth of all humans and is willing to subject its own cultural inclinations to the same kind of scrutiny that it directs toward other cultures. Tong appeals to Habermas to support his claim that *responsible* autonomy is a key aspect of any productive notion of democracy. He then applies his reflections to the disposition Chinese people typically bring to considerations of democracy within

Chinese politics. His next to last paragraph is worth quoting in some detail:

On the whole, according to Feng Qi, in the West priority was traditionally given to the principle of free will instead of the principle of reasonable thinking with regard to community life and collective decision-making. That is why in the West the social contract theory has been the most important tradition of democratic thinking and the idea of autonomy or self-rule has been the essential core of the definition of democracy. In China, by contrast, priority was traditionally given to the principle of reasonable thinking instead of the principle of free will with regard to community life and collective decision-making. . . . [Chinese people] are still used to giving priority to the principle of reasonable thinking, deeply skeptical of the value of individual free wills that are not believed to be supported by expert knowledge. (21)

The principle of reasonable thinking, in Confucian thought, is to pay attention to and be obedient to the Heavenly Principles abiding in one's mind and exemplified by the sage or wise ruler. This means being obedient to the authority even when this means denying natural desires. What is occurring in present-day China is a market-supported increase in promoting and satisfying individual desires at the expense of the traditional "thinking together" emphasized in Confucian China. What this might eventually mean for Chinese governance is an open question.

My commentary on these two articles will give one some idea of the richness of the reflections in this volume. But is there any relation to the thought of Polanyi? I will give one indirect and one direct illustration of such a connection.

First, as an example of an indirect allusion to a Polanyian notion, I would point to Gunnar Skirbekk's contribution to the volume. Skirbekk rejects what he calls "the liberalist attempt to secure private freedom as separate from the moral norms that are constitutive for serious discussions" (48) A democracy that empha-

sizes the individual's right to freedom from external interference will tend to encourage individuals to view the government as an unwelcome external force, a view now adopted by many Americans. Skirbekk argues that whether one dwells in a participatory or representative democracy, one is co-responsible for political decisions and their outcome. In this regard his view is comparable to Polanyi's emphasis on public liberty in contrast to private liberty. Public liberty involves persons acting freely on behalf of healthy social order both in ordinary ways - e. g., being informed and voting - and in structural ways - putting in place and supporting regulations that allow spontaneous orders to contribute to the common good.

Second, the only article in which Polanyi is explicitly discussed is Yu Zhenhua's "Towards a Thick Notion of Democracy via a Critical Examination of Michael Oakeshott." To greatly simplify Yu's rich argument, he attacks Oakeshott's view, seemingly based on Aristotle, that morality is best practiced in an unreflective way by following habits embedded in traditions. Oakeshott seems to think that when persons attempt to be moral by following moral rules or ideals, they substitute for the strength of habit the weakness of (rationally determined) will. Yu makes reference to Peter Winch and David Schön in showing that reflection is involved in applying habits, that Oakeshott's notion of reflection is curiously incomplete, and that his ethics is in some ways at odds with his political theory. Yu notes that Oakeshott's political theory includes a fruitful notion that is undermined by the inadequate dichotomy between habit and reflection that mars his ethical theory. Oakeshott fruitfully claims that political arrangements "compose a pattern and at the same time they intimate a sympathy for what does not fully appear" (quoted from Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* [Liberty Press, 1991], 56-57). What does not fully appear is immanent in a tradition of political behavior. Yu says,

In tackling various political problems, even political crises, people intelligently make use of the resources of their tradition. I suggest we call democracy in this sense "democracy as competence". By "democracy as competence", I mean a kind of political practical knowledge, whereby

people know how to go about their political activities in a democratic way in concrete, contingent situations when there is no abstract principle or general theory available to them. (74)

Democracy as competence may become routinized and result in democracy as habit, and it may be verbalized and related to political principles and ideals, issuing in what Yu calls democracy as an ideology. Yu's grounding notion of democracy as competence is an expression of Polanyian tacit knowing construed as intelligent behavior that need not rely on explicit political ideals and principles. Tacit knowing fills the gap Oakeshott leaves between unreflective or purely self-interested political habit and ideological or even deductive forms of highly rational political behavior. That is, Polanyian tacit knowing is an intelligent but not rationalistic manner of proceeding that better fulfills Oakeshott's proper emphasis on politics as pursuing intimations of existing traditions of behavior than Oakeshott's tendency to think in terms of dichotomies otherwise allows.

The last three articles in this collection deal with discussions of democracy within the Chinese context. Lin Zhang notes that the term "democracy" was Mao Zedong's most powerful weapon of publicity in opposing both the Japanese and Chiang Kai-Shik (95). But it was a conditional kind of democracy that faded once Communist supremacy in China was established. But, as Pan Derong argues, Mao's temporary emphasis on democracy is not new in Chinese history; forms of democracy can be traced back to Confucius and Mencius. Pan sees a major difference between Western and Chinese ideas of democracy to be the difference between a legalistic and a moralistic foundation respectively. And Zhao Xiuyi shows that the discussion of what form of democracy is best for China now is a hot and unresolved question. In sum, all these essays give witness to the fact that there are indeed multiple ideas of democracy.

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Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xxix + 286. ISBN 978-0-19-533321-3. \$35.00. Cloth.

In *Supersizing the Mind*, Andy Clark offers a spirited defense of an idea that he and David Chalmers first set out in their 1998 essay, "The Extended Mind" (reprinted as an appendix to the book). In this work, Clark continues to argue that mind should be construed as something more than the biological brain (and associated nervous system). For Clark, the notion of mind should include the "...inextricable tangles of feedback, feed-forward, and feed-around loops... that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world" (xxviii). Put differently, Clark argues that "human minds and bodies are essentially open to episodes of deep and transformative restructuring in which new equipment (both physical and 'mental') can become quite literally incorporated into the thinking and acting systems that we identify as our minds and bodies" (30-31). Mind therefore is a phenomenon that emerges where brain, body, and the world (both social and material) connect (219). The case of Otto serves as a paradigm for Clark. Otto suffers from Alzheimer's disease but manages to negotiate the world successfully by using a notebook that serves as his memory (xi and 226 ff). Clark wonders why the notebook should not be understood as part of Otto's mind, since it certainly aids his cognitive (and practical) functions.

Clark devotes the first part of the book (Chs. 1-4) to evidence for construing the mind as extended; a summary of the entire range can be found on pp. 81-2. One interesting line that Clark draws from is the principle of "ecological control." It seems that engineers, in their efforts to design and build robots, have learned that achieving programming goals does not require "...micromanaging every detail of the desired action or response but by making the most of robust, reliable sources of relevant order in the bodily or worldly environment..." (5-6). Another line of evidence by which we extend our minds into the world, according to Clark, is language (Ch. 3). Labeling, for example, provides a way of grouping or otherwise

making sense of the world, as well as making it possible to think about—and modify—our own thinking. Thus language serves “to anchor and discipline intrinsically fluid and context-sensitive modes of thought and reason” (53). Our use of space to simplify cognitive processes is another way we extend our mind beyond simply our biological brain (Ch. 4). One simple example is how a cook might arrange ingredients in the order they will be used rather than having to constantly refer back to a recipe. The picture of human cognition that emerges from Clark’s analysis is that of fluid processes that are “soft assembled from a motley crew of neural, bodily, and external resources” (197).

In the second part of the book (Chs. 5-7), Clark defends his position first by responding to specific criticisms and then by enumerating what he sees as advantages to the view of extended mind. At root of these various criticisms seems to be the fear that viewing mind as something embodied not only in brain, but in various external props and tools, minimizes the brain’s role in cognition. To this concern, Clark quite explicitly argues that the biological brain remains “in the driver’s seat...but once such an organization is in place, it is the flow and transformation of information in (what is often) an extended, distributed system that provide the machinery of ongoing thought and reason” (122; see also 165). What we gain from an extended view of mind is thereby “...the essential lens through which to appreciate the startling power and elegance of the neural machinery, observed at home in its proper ecological setting” (141).

Despite the value of the extended view, Clark does recognize that it has its limits, which he explores in the third part of the book (Chs. 8-10). He criticizes certain models of sensory-motor action for failing to acknowledge the “firewalls” and complexity of ways we interact with our world (Ch. 8). In addition, he addresses what he thinks are misunderstandings of embodiment that treat embodiment as a stricture on cognition (Ch. 9). Instead of seeing embodiment as a problem, Clark understands the physical body to be the “organ of active sensing, the means to information self-structuring, and the enabling structure supporting a

variety of extended problem-solving organizations” (217).

For readers of this journal, the book can be read as an extended commentary on and extension of many of Michael Polanyi’s ideas. While Polanyi’s name never appears in the text, notes, bibliography, or index, there are certainly affinities between Clark’s work and that of Polanyi; I shall highlight three that might bear further investigation. The first is that while Clark does not speak of indwelling or the from/to structure of knowing, these ideas are compatible with much of what he says. See, for example, Clark’s discussion of how the body or a pen can become “transparent equipment” that we “see through” to accomplish the task at hand (10). A second affinity between Clark and Polanyi can be found in Clark’s attention to part/whole relations, as well as his notions of ecological and soft control, which echo Polanyi’s discussion of comprehensive wholes that reflect a multi-layered reality wherein control is hardly simple and mechanistic. Finally, Clark’s discussion of what language allows us to accomplish is compatible with Polanyi’s discussion of the powers of articulate thought.

Overall, Clark makes a largely compelling argument for the view he calls extended mind. He uses an impressive array of evidence, from everyday examples of people like Otto, to work in robotics, artificial intelligence, and neurology. He is also refreshingly civil in his rejoinders to critics (although I do wonder, at times, if he has not overly simplified their views). The book is at times disjointed and repetitive, which is not surprising since much was published previously in other settings. However, the biggest blind spot I find in the argument has to do with Clark’s enthusiasm for how we constantly augment our cognitive powers. I am troubled by claims that our “boundaries and components are *forever* negotiable” and flexible (43, emphasis added). Are we, in fact, infinitely plastic creatures? Are there limits to our flexibility such that at some point we cease to be “humanly” embodied? Those are questions I wish Clark would address more explicitly and carefully.

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