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The International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP) Report 2018: a response

Simon Reid-Henry

School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

ABSTRACT
In this response I reflect on the contributions of the recently published report of the International Panel on Social Progress. I focus in particular on the Report's treatment of the relationship between inequality and democracy: the proper subject of Chapter 14 in Part II of the report but also a central concern throughout text. I begin by setting the Report's arguments more fully in the historical context of the past few decades, and specifically the post-1970s era. I then interrogate in more detail the relationship between liberalism and democracy before examining each of three key themes raised by the report: the domestic challenges posed by economic inequality to political pluralism; the relationship between the state and globalisation; and the extent to which current institutional arrangements of liberal democratic systems articulate and safeguard the basic values and moral principles of democracy. I conclude by looking forward.

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1. Introduction

I should firstly like to extend my gratitude for the chance to respond to the work of the International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP), culminating in the publication of its first report in 2018. The IPSP is refreshingly unafraid, as the Executive Summary declares, to ask 'existential questions about capitalism, socialism, democracy, religions, inequalities and so on' (IPSP, 2018, p. 2). This is welcome. As a geographer, I am often struck by the fact that a great many works of social and political science leave out the larger picture. The IPSP does an admirable job of putting that wider context back in, with 'a synthesis that is more than any one brain alone could produce' (IPSP, 2018, p. 4). Inevitably this means there are a variety of perspectives at work in the Report, and certainly no one theoretical

CONTACT s.reid-henry@qmul.ac.uk School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, UK

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approach dominates. But while this too imposes constraints on what the analysis can 'do' it mostly leavens the writing with insights. The Report is also timely. Today there is growing recognition that the major problems society confronts are once again overtly *public* problems: be it human-induced climate change in the anthropocene or the resurgence of a destructive identity politics and xenophobic nationalism. Yet, there is also a reluctance to understand the reasons why: as demonstrated by Jonathan Mijs' work on the 'paradoxical' fact that rising inequality appears to go hand in hand with a firm belief in meritocracy (Mijs, 2019). Addressing itself to a broad audience, the Report can be read as an effort to correct for this. Its primary contribution is to weave together an account of some of the most pressing socio-economic issues of the day, with an analysis of the structural reasons behind their development. It combines, in effect, a wide-ranging 'state of the art' with a more critical diagnosis of the problems.

In its fundamentals, this account traces back from symptoms to causes some of the reasons for the unstable relationship between capitalism, liberalism, and democracy in the modern world (often primarily the western liberal democratic world – and accordingly I confine my comments here also primarily to a Euro-American context). The Report acknowledges the power of capitalism as well as the tensions between liberalism – rights in persons versus rights in property, as Bowles and Gintis (1986) would put it; though cf. Bell (2014) for a fuller exegesis of 'liberalism' – and democracy as the dominant political form in which capitalism is today put to work. At the heart of this broader reckoning with capitalism, liberalism and democracy, however, lies a more specific conjuncture: the relationship between democracy and inequality. It is this that I have been asked to focus my comments upon, and I should like to do so by dividing them into four parts. *First*, I briefly set the report's analysis in its wider historical context of the relationship between capitalism, liberalism, and democracy. *Second*, I offer a brief account of some of the more concrete changes to liberal democratic institutions and values since the 1970s raised in the Report. This sets up the *third* section where I examine in greater detail the Report's treatment of three key aspects of this underlying shift, as it bears upon democracy and inequality: the relationship between economic inequality and political pluralism; between the state and globalisation; and between equality and autonomy. *Fourth*, I conclude with some observations that point the IPSP's analysis forward.

2. Historicising the IPSP

One of the central arguments to be found in the IPSP Report is how the interplay between inequality and democracy, which can in good times be a virtuous circle (democratisation begets egalitarianism, and vice versa), can in harder times become a vicious circle (more inequality begets less democracy, and vice

versa (Milanovic, 2017)). By protecting the rights and civil status of persons, democracy enables socio-economic equality to become reality; yet, when less wealthy or any individuals feel the political process no longer represents their interests, their commitment to democratic proceduralism wanes. To be sure, the IPSP is not alone in pursuing this idea: the latest issue of the Varieties of Democracy project's index on liberal democracy reports that 'countries that have seen increasing inequalities have also registered shrinking democratic space', particularly over the last decade or so (Lindbard, 2019). Recent work, such as that of Gabriel Zucman and Emmanuel Saez, in their *The Triumph of Injustice* (2019), similarly addresses the longer-term secular reasons behind the turn towards more unequal social economies in liberal democracies in recent decades. The relevant question, at least so far as policy is concerned however, is which of these is the dependent variable? Is it inequality that undermines democracy, or the failure of democracy that allows for inequality?

In truth, one cannot untangle this problem outside of the history of the period the Report seeks to explain: we cannot answer a priori, in other words, the question of whether inequality or democracy changes first since it depends entirely on the detail of what has happened. The Report routinely reminds us, for example, that 'the neoliberal model has undermined [the] intermediary institutions (parties, unions, voluntary associations) that had been at the basis of the development of the welfare state and democratic capitalism' (IPSP, 2018, p. 28). But is the assumption here that democracy itself was ticking along comfortably before the neoliberal wave? Surely many of the aforementioned elements – parties, unions, voluntary associations – were in decline already by then (e.g. Mair, 2013)? Postwar modernisation, we are told, 'promised economic growth, equality, the rule of law, and democracy' – promises that were largely delivered on, until the economic upheavals of the 1970s brought 'les trentes glorieuses' to a halt. We might agree that the postwar era of stability and growth, for all that it was fleeting, was more than just a mirage. Yet I find that a critical observation the Report makes here – that this fleetingly benign era was not free of 'internal tensions' inherent to liberal democracy – is somewhat overlooked in the remainder of the analysis, which is more concerned with documenting (with good reason) the deleterious effects of inequality *upon* democracy: as if democracy itself was already everything it needed to be.

Many of the comments which follow are thus framed by a desire to pull some of this history back in. Admittedly, this entails overlooking something of the Report's intended global scope. But it also has the effect of sharpening our understanding of how democracy and inequality alike changed in relation to the ideology of political liberalism. The modern liberal democratic state form took shape only relatively recently: in the aftermath of the first world war, when liberal commitments to constitutional safeguards, individual freedoms and the rule of law converged with popular movements for mass democracy (Bobbio,

1988/2005; Bobbio & Bellamy, 1987; Tooze, 2016).[1] It took a crisis of capitalism in the interwar period, followed by another world war, before the need to reconcile capitalism with a more managed form of democratic liberalism further 'locked in' as a set of relatively coherent institutional arrangements (such as the welfare state) and an accompanying value-system (geared to what in the US was known as the 'vital center'). Spurred on by the unprecedented economic growth of the postwar years, this 'liberal democratic' state form reached its zenith in the mid-late twentieth century. By the early 1970s levels of income inequality were the lowest they had been all century (Piketty, 2014).

But in the 1970s, something happened. It was as if, of a sudden, 'Liberalism, which promised the separation between the state and the market . . . evolved into a neoliberalism based on the domination of the corporation, exacerbated by privatization and deregulation' (IPSP, 2018). The question of course is: how? One answer is that, democracy being achieved, social progress simply stymied, breaking into endless rounds of a struggle between competing 'distributional coalitions'. This was the answer championed at the time by the likes of Mancur Olson (1982). Another answer is that liberal democratic politicians in Europe and North America in particular acquiesced in a radical change to the prevailing rules of political economy in an effort to retain their grip on power amidst the inflationary chaos of the era (Tooze & Eich, 2015). A third answer is that, at this moment of anti-utopianism politically, and considerable innovation economically, a less 'public' form of democracy, more attuned to individual rights than collective obligations, was taken to be the answer to the era's multiple social and political challenges to the prevailing liberal order (Reid-Henry, 2019). It was liberalism that changed first, in other words, and it is along each of these arcs that the report's analysis travels.

3. Politics and social progress: or, liberalism *contra* democracy

But what is it about liberalism that changed, exactly? Briefly put, the manner of liberal elites' support for democracy is what changed (cf. Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975 and the Trilateral Commission's *Crisis of Democracy* Report). The IPSP report is in many ways a countervailing pillar to that earlier report, and yet, it somewhat glosses over this question of the relationship between changing liberal values and shifting democratic commitments by virtue of the abstract definition of democracy it adopts – 'a process of collective decision making among persons, which issues in collectively binding norms for the society of those persons' (np). As any of the current examples of popular discontent attest, be it Brexit, trump, or the *gilets jaunes*, the democracies we live in are

[1] The result, says Tooze, writing of 1917 as something of a breakthrough year, was 'a compound notion of 'liberal democracy' that was riven with contradictions, but nonetheless now served to define the 'democratic west'.

anything but this ideal form. They are all cut through with the realities of combining demands for democratic equality from below with liberal freedoms and capitalism's enshrining of the social value of property rights in particular. '[T]his is not the end of history', the IPSP rightly insists in recognition of this more political history. And yet with regard to the matter of equality and social progress, for some time, arguably, it has been. This has been the period when it was assumed by politicians in particular that liberalism, capitalism, and democracy *can* co-exist unproblematically.

This belief has been predicated upon a series of tweaks made to the political-economic basis of democracy, in which 'government at a distance' and laissez-faire economics replaced the earlier Keynesian wager that popular consent could be fought for and won by political actors accepting responsibility for their actions (rather than, as today, handing it over to the judiciary or independent central banks) (Krippner, 2011, chap. 5; Rose and Miller, 1992, p. 173). Typically in the Report, we hear more about what has been lost and less about what has replaced it. Yet, the making of actually existing liberal democracies has involved not only a move away from the past but the creation of *new* forms of democracy as well. One consequence of this is the appearance of what Yascha Mounk has stylistically referred to as 'illiberal democracies' on the one hand and 'undemocratic liberalism' on the other hand (Mounk, 2018). Another is what Nils Gilman terms the 'plutocratic insurgency' of deviant globalisation, in which wealthy elites secure their private interests behind walled-off compounds from where they then launch an assault on the 'costly' public goods and services they no longer need (Gilman, 2014). Both capture something of the actual political (e.g. class, race, gender) dynamics that have altered the relationship between democracy and inequality (whose broad trend lines the report concentrates on mapping).

In each their different ways both also point to two sets of changes that have been particularly significant for the relationship between democracy and inequality. The first concerns a reduction in the quality and nature of democratic *institutions* (here, we could look at the progressive gerrymandering of US electoral districts for example and ask what constellation of power and privilege is required to enforce that redrawing of the map). The second concerns the changes in our political *values* (and more pointedly put our understanding of what constitutes political virtue) to which the Report ultimately points us back. This is in part a problem that stems from the increasingly complex social bases for effective communication in a modern political society. Factors like technology play a role here. Would the UK have voted for Brexit if the people had been better informed? Would Americans have voted for Trump if they had not been encouraged to do so by Russian social media bots?[2] But it is not just

[2] Or to take a more abstract example: for all that it may be fairly uncontroversial in a democracy to consider free speech a fundamental democratic right, free speech itself can today only be secured on the basis of prior, far less 'positive law' commitments: to certain norms of respect, empathy and understanding.

about media and technology. The recent success of Greta Thunberg's climate strike movement is a reminder not only of the obvious fact that the younger generation remains more willing than its forebears to challenge the values of the prevailing status quo; it is a reminder of the truly global plane upon which such politics now plays out (witness Thunberg's journey from Stockholm school protest to United Nations General Assembly in a little over a year). In other words, in terms of both institutions and values, the historical form that is liberal democracy has transformed over the past half century as the liberal democratic state has adapted to the challenges of a global age.

One consequence of a great many of these changes has been a narrowing of the scope of democracy (consider the modern gig economy and the rise of a precariat today in light of the many debates over autonomism and workplace democracy in the 1970s and early 1980s, for example: in other words, the evacuation of democracy from the realm of the economy) and a related rise in political and economic inequality alike. For me personally, it is in addressing precisely this conjuncture that the IPSP makes some of its most significant contributions, and in the following section, I want to try to elaborate on some of these. In particular, the IPSP draws our attention to three basic faultlines in contemporary liberal democracies that warrant further comment: the domestic challenges of economic inequality to political pluralism; the problems raised by the way that state-based democratic systems are today forced to operate in a wider global order; and the extent to which current institutional arrangements of liberal democratic systems do (and do not) articulate and safeguard the basic values and moral principles of the specifically public form of equality the Report enshrines as the core value of democratic life. In what follows I shall try to address each of these faultlines in turn.

4. Mapping the shifts

4.1. Economic inequality vs political pluralism

The first of these central claims of the IPSP with respect to democracy and inequality is that democracy's commitment to public equality ought in theory to impose a discipline of collective negotiation with respect to economic outcomes. It is *this*, the Report suggests, that helps to mitigate against the inherent bias of personal and clan preferences that may be amplified in an under-regulated economic arena. Yet of late, this has been breaking down. The loosening of democratic constraints on the economy (through corporate tax-breaks or the granting of monopolies on new technology) increasingly erodes this collective discipline and intensifies the unevenness of its effects. The opening of political procedures to big money then allows the democratic system itself to be influenced by this (the decision in the US to allow super-PAC funding, for example, via the ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*). This

creates noisy yet not always well-directed struggles in its wake (often insisting that 'the system' is corrupt) that the Report well documents. But, again, it is worth also setting these more recent developments in historical perspective. The shifting relationship between (rising) economic inequality and (declining) political pluralism is a notable feature of the democratic present, for example. Yet, there remain many less novel tensions inherent to democracy with which these recent developments intersect: democracy's very publicness has always enabled a private maldistribution of power within the household, for example, meaning some people (women usually) reap less than others from even the fairest of public economic distributions.

Not all developments of recent decades have been disappointments. The IPSP rightly observes that one clear positive outcome from the past few decades is the way in which the struggle for civil and political rights launched in the 1960s and 1970s became institutionally embedded in western society over later years. The status of women is not today on a par with men, but it is more nearly so than it was in the early 1960s when women still did not have the vote in Switzerland. The status of blacks is not today on a par with whites, but it is more nearly so than it was in the early 1960s when African Americans still could not vote in six US states (IPSP, Chapter 14). Nonetheless, social hierarchies persist and in times when inequality is worsening, they provide ready-made faultlines along which the vectors of inequality operate: a trend that is visible today in countries such as Poland and Hungary. Frequently, these social hierarchies take a clear spatial form as well: be it the demarcation of the public vs private domain and the assignment of gender roles to each, as noted above; or underinvestment in social services in less wealthy parts of the city and the creation of ghettos at their edges. Such spatial articulations of inequality may further reinforce the processes of societal dis-equalisation. Britain is a highly unequal nation in no small part because of the under-resourcing of its former industrial north and the excessive patronisation of financial services in the South (e.g. McCann, 2019, p. 13), and that is, in turn, a function of both the lack of political voice northern electorates have over the formation of national policy-making in London and the lack of any systemic counterweight to this (such as a system of *national* planning).[3] As recent work by Christophers (2018) similarly attests, a politics of social progress requires addressing the myriad ways by which democratic societies acquiesce in such spatially embedded inequalities and become inured to their effects.

There is another, more profound, way in which the 'space' of democracy comes to matter, however, and it turns on the tensions between democracy as a civic-political system and democracy as a socio-economic one. Berlin famously argued that civic-political rights are free to enforce, whereas

[3] For this point, I am grateful to Lucy Natarajan for outlining it at a meeting of London Inequality Studies at Lincolns Inn Fields, October 2019.

socio-economic ones require progressive and costly interventions. But in today's world, the elaborate security artifices required to sustain civic rights may turn out to be more expensive than a simple educational intervention. Thus, no small part of the reason for the long slide towards greater inequality in democratic societies is the way that they have come to unevenly valorise the two dimensions of democracy (the civic-political vs the socio-economic). For much of the past few decades, it has been easier to undertake political reforms (e.g. through the introduction of direct democracy initiatives, referenda, citizens assemblies, and the like) than it has been, say, simply to raise taxes. Put more sharply: democracy as a system for the management of individual rights has grown; democracy as a public forum for determining the distribution of political and economic power has declined. This bifurcation of the space of democracy is at the heart of a great many of the problems we encounter today and which the Report seeks to diagnose.

What is left hanging in between these two poles of civic-political rights and socio-economic capabilities is the matter of diminishing public 'voice' and, connected to this, the declining legitimacy of governing authorities in the eyes of 'the people'. This is apparent in a range of popular political movements today. The rise of neoliberal executives and the erosion of channels of routine participation (Wolkenstein, 2018) leave many without a meaningful voice (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). At the same time, the political process – and political elites in particular – is increasingly 'insulated' from such voice as the people do have (Slobodian, 2018). It is little wonder that popular suspicion of the modern technocratic government is increasing in such an environment. It is also of some concern: with one consequence being that the exchange of confidences upon which is erected representative democracy's solution to the problem of popular sovereignty in modern societies is undone in such a context. When political representatives are not trusted to make good and fair decisions on behalf of their constituencies, they lose the incentive even to try.

Contrary to much contemporary political debate, the problem here is not simply the need for greater 'responsiveness' much less 'congruence' between popular sentiment, systems of government, and policy outcomes: as if a greater degree of naturalness should be our ideal of political harmony cf. Miller & Stokes, 1963). What is needed, rather, are ways to better institutionalise, both efficiently *and* fairly, the (always) ongoing task of negotiating the opposing interests that must make up the general will. As a structural problem, this is central to the vision of social progress that the Report wishes to raise. And one hopes future editions may provide a greater sense of the actual role of the political movements, parties and even movement-parties that are necessary to bring that about (cf. Berman, 1997). At present, such movements are predominantly referenced in the Report as examples of underlying phenomena. The primary political development considered in detail is populism, and that is sometimes treated as epiphenomena – 'populist demagoguery'

– rather than as a rooted or historically determined form of social struggle. One hopes for discussion of a range of structural changes too: such as to the way our systems of planning, infrastructure, and the like are managed in ways that can be inequality enhancing or inequality reducing.

4.2. The state and globalisation

The emergence of globalising societies further complicates this picture, both because it creates more diverse, pluralistic societies, as the Report notes, and because globalisation's welcome reduction of inequality between national states has been countered by its intensification of inequality within societies. Ironically this has impacted rich, western societies in particular. It is the western lower middle classes who have fared least well of all, globally, during the age of globalisation (Milanovic, 2016). As inequality increases, levels of disgruntlement grow, and partisan politics finds a more supportive audience (consider the rise of Donald Trump in the USA, of Golden Dawn in Greece or Jobbik in Hungary: countries which, despite their many differences, have all seen sharp increases in both inequality and political polarisation over recent years). Here is one flexion point where the virtuous circle between democracy and equality turns vicious since the more radical parties that disgruntled and disengaged citizens vote for often also turn out to be the same parties most likely to introduce anti-democratic reforms: curtailing the rights of certain categories of minority citizen, for example.

For all nations, however, globalisation imposes a number of more general challenges to democratic societies. The IPSP draws attention to two of these in particular: The first concerns the way that democratic societies must engage, via treaties, international organisations and agreements, with other societies – not all of which are democratic and not all of which enter into treaties or agreements on equal terms. Second, democratic societies are subject to 'exit' by powerful economic actors who can impose costs upon the state if it refuses to meet their needs (such as a desire to pay lower taxes and wages that may run contrary to the needs of less powerful and mobile individual citizens as may be employed by those economic actors). Democratic leaders themselves are thus coming under greater pressure than before to acquiesce in policies that they know will lead to greater inequality. The problem that globalisation poses to democracy is not simply the much-touted *weakening* of national parliaments, therefore. With democratic states now beholden to constituencies other than their own citizenry, those same parliaments are also encouraged to act against poorer domestic classes in search of the investment capital they hope will win them the support of more elite domestic classes: precisely so as to *restore* their own power.

As a result of globalisation, the national democratic state has changed in other ways too. During the past half century, the social (welfare) state has

shrunk, while the security state, responding to international tensions through domestic retrenchment, has deepened. This is how actually existing democratic states have come to be articulated within globalisation: and it turns out that here, at least, Marxists like Henri Lefebvre and Nicos Poulantzas were more accurate in their predictions in the 1970s than those who in the 1990s decried the state that was being eroded by globalisation (cf. Lobao, Gray, Cox, & Kitson, 2018). For Lefebvre, the state was not overrun by globalisation, rather it became the concrete means – fully available for capture – through which globalisation was realised. The IPSP picks up on a more recent variant of this argument: namely Wolfgang Streeck's concept of the 'consolidation state': a state constantly matching and mending between its primary resources, its citizens, and the global market (Streeck, 2015).

The Report offers a particularly striking image in this regard: of government executives taking powers *from* parliaments and legislatures (think of the USA PATRIOT Act) while equally handing other powers over *to* the market (e.g. through creating independent central banks or by constraining fiscal policy in the name of the prioritised goal of inflation targeting). What this reminds us, once again, is that globalisation itself is not the problem: rather it is the way, in which states have responded to it that is crucial. The EU, for example, is ultimately a *state*-led response to globalisation. The early development of the European Economic Community was famously described by Alan Milward, after all, as 'the European rescue of the nation-state'. And it is a remarkable achievement for it. Its capacity to address some of the avowedly transnational challenges of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century era demonstrates what societies, exchanging sovereignty for collective gain, can achieve. But the history of the EU during the past three decades equally reveals the problems of failing to institutionalise the social and economic rights of populations, as opposed to simply their freedom to move and to trade.

The failure of the EU's 'social' versus its 'free market' versions would seem to confirm this. And I think this represents a more profound dislocation in contemporary democracy than the Report suggests. As it stands, we are offered a 'funnel' of problems, whereby socio-economic inequality, the marginalisation of 'minorities, women, and the young' and globalisation as an intensifier of these other problems, result in the political upheaval of a specific form: populism. I think there is much else that leads to populism, and many more problems with democracy than populism alone responds to. Time and again, in fact, the problem with specifically *liberal* democratic societies in the modern age boils down to the over-privileging of the rights of property and capital relative to those of public goods (such as the environment and welfare). And this plays out in myriad ways.

One way that it has played out since the early 1970s has been via the chase for declining productivity growth that fuelled a slew of labour and market

policies allowing inequality to rise once again in an effort to restore to business its prior rate of profit. These decades have seen stagnant wages for the lower middle classes, the social detachment of the rich, and a fraying of the basic distributive commitment to share out a portion of national wealth. One consequence of this trend has been the standoff we see today between territorial nationalism which is raised (wrongly but popularly) as the antithesis to economic globalism. If globalisation matters here, it is not simply as an intensifier of domestic inequities, in other words, but because it transforms the terrain of political agency itself. Democracy and inequality alike are shaped and experienced differently at different political scales. And again, I would point to the experience of the EU as an institutional apparatus that exists between the state and 'globalisation'. One of the long-standing popular critiques of the EU, for example, concerns its so-called democratic deficit. But is that the problem? Or is it more that there is no fiscal counterpart to monetary union; that the more democratic voice of the European parliament plays second fiddle – as its architects like Giscard d'Estaing well knew – to the managerialist European Council? The core problem with the EU is not that it challenges the contemporary national state, but that it suffers from the very same fate: the way in which global market liberalism, combined with a thin conception of human rights and a professionalisation of politics, have together replaced the twentieth century's more overtly public political arenas as the icons to be worshipped at the altar of utopia.

4.3. Equality and autonomy

Of course, none of the preceding matters unless we are convinced that inequality requires *actively* keeping in hand and democracy *actively* safeguarding beyond the passive tools of constitutional law and democratic proceduralism. Many *do* think this, of course, libertarians in particular, although the authors of the IPSP Report are avowedly not among them. The IPSP is, in fact, one of the most explicit of the public documents I have seen arguing for a more active approach to safeguarding democracy from the scourge of inequality: 'the crisis of democracy is also a crisis of equality as a political concept', we are told, and contrary the libertarian position which calls for no more than respecting the basic political rights of citizens, the IPSP demands 'a set of distributive principles that go beyond respect for basic rights: equality of opportunity, (luck) egalitarianism, prioritarianism, and maximin'. In specifying exactly what is required the report cleaves largely to the view put forward by Fleurbaey (2015) that there is a minimal difference between egalitarians and prioritarians (that whether or not you wish to address inequality because it is inherently 'bad' or because its effects are particularly deleterious for some rather than others is moot) and that what matters therefore, in a policy context, is the efficiency by which one levels the field: namely the maximin principle.

The problem with this is one raised most sharply by Philip Pettit in his discussion of justice and legitimacy. 'Normative thinking about legal, political, and social institutions has been dominated over the past quarter century or more by the ideal of justice, in particular social or distributive justice', Pettit argues. 'This focus on justice is unfortunate, because it has suggested that there is only one basic ideal that we need to think about in our normative projects' (Pettit, 2012, p. 59). In other words, for any programme that takes social progress as its stated goal, it is important to consider not only what makes for 'convincing' policy arguments (their efficiency, say) but also what makes for legitimately 'doable' policy arguments (that is to say, the forms of coercion by which they may be enacted). This was not a problem for the mid-late twentieth century state, where prior to the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s levels of commitment and conformity to public regulation in the name of democracy were much higher (as, accordingly, were tax rates). It is a problem today.

It is fruitless to consider this any further without addressing the matter of the IPSPs normative stance. Certainly, it has one and, though implicit, I take it to be largely Rawlsian. Where the report steps right into its Rawlsian-inflected account of social justice in Chapter Two it might be useful, however, to first briefly step back. As Teresa Bejan has observed, a great many arguments for social progress and equality get trapped in what she calls the 'social justice' cul-de-sac when they take the scourge of inequality as an unproblematised starting point for their defence of a fairer society (Bejan, 2017). Does it matter, to take just one salient point from this that the IPSP's language of change derives from the same historical moment from which the core problems it identifies also spring (equality of opportunity and the maximin, for example, both of which have a post-1970s lineage)? I think in one sense at least it does. One of the great strengths of the report is that it expands the discussion of inequalities to include not just socio-economic divides but religious, ethnic, gender, racial, generational and other forms of inequality too. Not only does the matter of inequality in each of these domains have a far longer history. More significantly each of these problems is avowedly less amenable to quantifiable veridiction as to what sort of 'threshold' of fairness one should be aiming for. For each of these other dimensions of inequality, in other words, it matters more even than it does for socio-economic fairness that not only are the social ends we seek to achieve fair but that the arguments and interventions by which we would achieve them (what Pettit would file under 'legitimacy' rather than 'justice') are also fair.

This under-specification of means and ends has significance for the Report's treatment of the relationship between inequality and democracy. One of the most nuanced treatments of inequality and democracy in the report concerns the thorny relationship between state secularism and religious un/freedoms. I say un/freedoms because religious practices may be no less exclusionary than an enforced secularisation of religion (and some religions more than

others) can indeed be exclusionary. When one places democratic Catholic France, authoritarian Orthodox Russia and Kemalist Turkey on a spectrum, as the Report does, this complexity begins to become apparent (IPSP, 2018). As the IPSP tellingly puts it of Western European nations specifically: 'Blind to the more complex dimension of interreligious inequalities, they do not even see that in this dimension they are not secular'. This is a powerful reminder that it is not so much 'what' one does so much as 'how' one does it that matters: and this has always been a rather awkward fact for the one-size-fits-all Rawlsian maximin principle.

A possible solution to this problem that the report *does* consider is to turn to the principle of proportionality (Brighouse & Fleurbaey, 2010; Marion Young, 1990/2011). One wonders, however, whether a more robustly republican theory of justice might better support the vision of social progress the report seeks by attaching social fairness not to the abstract principle of justice but to the more concrete principle of freedom as non-domination (I raise this as a question, rather than a recommendation). Pettit's notion of freedom as non-domination sneaks a good deal of equality in through the back door, after all, and while it may not be sufficient in some respects, it provides at least a critical starting point for more comprehensive approaches to justice after that. Moreover, it resonates more fully with the contemporary feeling for *autonomy* that more overtly egalitarian strategies seem to transgress in the current age. In other words, were the Report to focus not only on distributive elements of justice (equality) but also on the capabilities that justice requires (freedom) might it derive a more 'doable' platform for the realisation of its programme of reforms (cf. Pettit, 2014, p. xix). Let me raise two final historical points by the way of elaboration of this. Though neither is much discussed in the report, each of these points (a) feeds directly into the matrix of political upheaval the IPSP seeks to delineate and (b) suggests why the Rawlsian principle of permitting any and all inequalities so long as they contribute to the betterment of the least well off may not be up to task. Certainly, in each of these examples, it is non-domination rather than distributive share that needs correcting in the first instance.

First, it seems fair to assert that the nature of political subjectivity has changed since the end of the postwar era. The past few decades have seen the emergence of new forms of political agency in which solidarities have become increasingly identity-based, rather than civic-universal, in which a growing enumeration of rights has replaced duties as the basic political coin of democratic argument, and where political commitments have increasingly been subject not to the question 'is it good' but 'how much will it cost'. Political institutions have accordingly come to matter less than the provision of a basic equality of access to the political resource. Taken together these developments have hobbled progressives in particular for a generation because they have taken away the working-class subject that the left long represented (hence the

US Democrats' embrace of 'minorities'). At the same time, the rise of new constituencies – the precariat, say – has not yet gained political representation in part because the political right's language of community and freedom of choice has also long been influential on the left. In this context, it is not obvious that a sufficiently well-sanctioned liberal society, as Rawls took for granted in the elaboration of his theory, actually exists any more. Nor is it obvious that the more demanding criterium of realising a just basic structure is realistically achievable in the first instance.

Cutting across and reinforcing this trend is a second basic development concerning democratic values. Briefly put we might say that, as democratic society has become secularised, democratic political culture has *at the same time* become more rudimentarily moralised. As I have argued elsewhere, the rise of conservative corporate evangelism in the US in the mid-late 1970s represents, perhaps, a relevant example of both trends (Reid-Henry, 2019). In this context, elites are encouraged to develop the passive virtues of tolerance and multiculturalism. They are not encouraged to engage actively with less well-resourced citizens – society becomes more siloed, as a result, and the powerful are less able to recognise such forms of power as they daily wield over others. One end result of this trend is not merely the much discussed disaffection and disengagement we see at all levels of society – from the 'insurgency' of the plutocrats to the populism of the disaffected – but an underlying misrecognition of the *truth* of political problems itself. Thus, as recent studies have shown, for all that there may, in fact, be a considerable room for agreement between the interests of capital and the democratic state, if political actors (masses and elites alike) assume there is not, then the effect is to shut out the possibility of exploring that middle ground (Hay & Rosamond, 2002).

5. Looking ahead

The IPSP launches its first report at a prescient time. If democracy changed somehow at the start of the period it takes as its primary focus, then the post-2016 turmoil we have been witness to should perhaps alert us to the fact that it may be changing once again today (Reid-Henry, 2019). Signs of a growing scepticism towards democracy are apparent right across the liberal democratic west. A recent Pew poll finds that 61% of Americans feel 'significant changes' are needed to the political system in that country (PEW, 2018). Yet, a different poll finds that people who believe the economy to be in 'poor shape' are also, in 24 out of the 27 countries surveyed, more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy in their country (PEW, 2019). Disaffection itself does not breed a mandate for constructive change, in other words. For Silicon Valley elites, democracy as plutocracy may be seen to work just fine (not least since, as the Report shoes, they are more likely than others to be able to use democracy to keep things as they are). For Occupy Wall Street protestors, by contrast, representative

democracy of any sort will never achieve the moral superiority of 'direct' forms of democracy precisely because of the way that some people, at present, are better able to flourish within it. We will need to be more explicit about the sort of democratic reforms we wish to see, in other words, if we wish to successfully argue for them since everything depends on whether the public are able to recognise and understand the issues at stake. As the work of Osberg and Smeeding (2006) shows, this may be far from straightforward.

The problem here, ironically, is that most of the challenges the IPSP rightly identifies that we need to confront are *not* sufficiently acute to mobilise large constituencies. It is impossible to put the IPSP Report down and not be more fully aware that the problem of democratic hollowing we are witness to today occurs at the confluence of a series of longer-term secular trends. The IPSP brings home the fact that, for all, there is much talk of a 'crisis of democracy' today, the real problems run deeper than the majority of issues usually discussed under this heading. Where then does one begin to seek to challenge these structural and secular forces? There is a certain tension between the Report's authors here. Clearly, some contributors think there is hope for a more global-scale democracy, others not. As the Report itself points out, if poor countries' democracy is constrained, this is not infrequently because of what well-functioning liberal democracies do to them via unequal international trade regulations and greater voting shares at the IMF. There are international inequalities that also shape how democracy plays out nationally, in other words: be it through migration or international trade rules. Furthermore, the challenges to democracy today also play out across a variety of different welfare state regimes (liberal, social-democratic, Christian democratic) and political systems (federalist, presidential, parliamentary), each of which have, in turn, quite variously incorporated elements of the neoliberal prescription (fiscal discipline, limited regulation, etc.). As the sociologist Peter Hall put it: 'If every democracy is unhappy, each is unhappy in its own way' (Hall, 2016). The challenge then is not perhaps to generalise but to embrace both this diversity of democratic realities and the wider power structure, in which their specific problems are embedded.

This is the wider context in which the Report sets forth a number of concrete solutions towards the end of Chapter 14. They include institutional reforms (like Proportional Representation) or ways of limiting the purchase of money on politics (such as voucher schemes or citizen panels). There is not the space here to comment on these individually. I should like to conclude instead by pointing out that the realisation of *any and all* of the Report's suggested improvements – most of which I am in agreement with – requires doing something else first: it requires developing a new language of change. For the last few decades, the language of reform has been the language of the social market. Whether the issue at stake be the need to repeal laws we do not need (de-criminalising marijuana say, as Canada recently has, since this, in turn, reduces the alibis for police

to carry out stop and search, which we know disproportionately targets ethnic minorities), or constructing social and educational systems that level the playing field from the start, we decide at present by asking questions about the cost of any changes and their measurable 'effect'. That is in many respects sensible and right. But if the underlying language is to be changed, as it must if democracies are to achieve the ambitions set out in this report for a fairer world, then there is a need to first address a much more basic problem: namely what sort of *compromises* are we prepared to make, what kind of liberalism, in other words, is it that we want to carry us towards that endpoint.

This is the nub of the point on which I draw my comments to a close. For half a century, since around the end of the post-war Golden Age, the answer to those questions has been to opt for a version of liberalism that consciously eschews the dangers of political utopianism by rejecting the idea of utopia altogether (often in exchange for a more technocratic, managerial political state and often in dialogue with a strong version of laissez-faire economics) (cf. Moyn, 2019). That, I argue, is the fundamental question to which these issues of inequality and democracy take us back. Modern liberal democracy is premised upon a balancing of the forces of liberty with those of equality. This was the twentieth century's answer to the nineteenth century's challenge of realising social progress both through and against the transformative force of capitalist modernity. But liberty and equality are not a natural coupling. And without something holding liberalism and democracy, and the freedom and equality they each code for in place, without some *positive* vision for society, liberal democracy is indeed in danger of institutional decline and political drift. In drawing our attention to this fundamental social fact, Marc Fleurbaey and his collaborators have given to us a timely, rich and most welcome intervention.

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Notes on contributor

Simon Reid-Henry is an historical and political geographer. His recent work engages with the themes of national and global inequality and the contemporary history of liberal democracy.

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