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Political majorities, political minorities and the common good:
An analysis of understandings of democracy in recent Christian
political ethics

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Southern Methodist University, 1994

POLITICAL MAJORITIES, POLITICAL MINORITIES AND THE

COMMON GOOD: AN ANALYSIS OF UNDERSTANDINGS OF

DEMOCRACY IN RECENT CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ETHICS

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

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with a

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by

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<u>Political Majorities, Political Minorities and the</u>
<u>Common Good: An Analysis of Understandings of</u>
<u>Democracy in Recent Christian Political Ethics</u>

        Advisor: Professor Joseph L. Allen

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        Within Christian theological ethics, it has become
almost axiomatic that Christian moral principles provide
support for political democracy. Yet these theological-
ethical discussions of democracy generally fail to address
important issues regarding the meaning of "democracy" in
an adequate manner, as Christian ethicists have tended to
take insufficient account of debates within democratic
political theory.

        This dissertation brings theological-ethical
concepts to bear on one important issue debated within
democratic theory. To what extent ought democracy be
considered as a political process primarily concerned with
arriving at majority decisions; to what extent ought
democracy be considered a political decision-making
process primarily concerned with the protection of the
interests of political minorities; or how might these
concerns be related? The work critically examines the
political-ethical positions of six Christian ethicists

(Yoder, Novak, Wogaman, Maritain, Sturm, Reinhold Niebuhr) to determine how their normative conceptions of democracy include majoritarian and/or minoritarian concerns. While their work does not confront this issue head-on, important conclusions can be drawn from examining it.

The analysis of the six theological ethicists leads me to conclude that an adequate normative conception of democracy ought to relate majoritarian and minoritarian concerns. The relationship ought to be a dynamic integration wherein certain compatibilities between the normative principles which ground majoritarian and minoritarian conceptions of democracy are developed, while recognizing continuing tensions between majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in the midst of socio-historical life. It also leads me to conclude that the common good provides an overarching political-ethical principle within which to relate differing moral principles. The final chapter develops a sketch of the common good and of a normative conception of democracy grounded in the common good.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Julie. In the midst of this prose project, she brought much needed poetry to my life.

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CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ETHICS
AND DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Political democracy seems to have won the day as governments in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe struggle to form democratic regimes. The meaning of this "victory" eludes us, in part, because the meaning of "democracy" is contestable.[1] We can ask, for instance, whether democracies ought to be seen as systems of governing wherein majorities rule over any range of issues they choose, or whether they ought to be seen primarily as limited governments charged with the protection of the rights and liberties of all alike. This question, in fact, will be a central focus of our work. We shall also ask whether a synthesis of these views is possible, normatively desirable or both.

These questions belong to the arena of ethics. Issues about the moral principles we want embodied in our governing system underlie questions about desirable forms of democracy. Persons of Christian faith might reasonably look to writers of Christian political ethics for some

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[1]William E. Connolly, _The Terms of Political Discourse_ (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1974), Ch. 1.

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guidance on these matters. What do they have to offer us?

This chapter begins examining debates about the meaning and purpose of democracy in the literatures of Christian political ethics and political theory. It will ask about the need for, and desirability of, a more adequate dialogue between these disciplines in the debate over the appropriate place of majoritarian and minoritarian considerations in a morally adequate view of political democracy.

Christian Thinking About Democracy

One cannot ignore the tradition of Christian support for democracy as one consults the recent literature in Christian political ethics. Many have come to view political democracy as part of the way Christians live out their faith in the God of Jesus Christ. Though the Church has existed and even thrived in the midst of a wide variety of polities, one might nevertheless argue that democracy provides a more adequate expression of Christian faith commitments than other ways of governing. While some recent Christian theological ethicists have challenged these positions, the view that Christianity has close affinities with democracy and democratic forms of civil government has become almost axiomatic in twentieth-century Christian political-ethical thought. In 1939, Gregory Vlastos could write, "that the Christian faith

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sanctions and supports the democratic way of life is fast

becoming a platitude."[2]

Characteristic arguments for the link between

Christian faith and political democracy can be found in

some of the basic Christian ethics texts of the mid-

twentieth century, e.g., George Thomas' Christian Ethics

and Moral Philosophy.[3] In a chapter on "Christianity and

Democracy," Thomas provides a rather typical argument for

the link between Christian faith and political democracy.

For Thomas "the democratic ideal is superior to other

forms of government and ways of life, because it is more

in accord with the Christian conceptions of man and

community."[4] He supports this thesis by arguing that: (1)

democracy is less likely than other forms of government to

overlook the good of any individual or group; (2)

democracy furthers the development of practical

intelligence and moral virtue in persons by giving them

political responsibility; (3) human persons are rational

and thus ought to be given the opportunity to participate

in their own governing; (4) democracy provides more space

for freedom and individual creativity than other forms of

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[2]Gregory Vlastos, Christian Faith and Political
Democracy (NY: Hazen Books, 1939), 14.

[3]George F. Thomas, Christian Ethics and Moral
Philosophy (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1955.

[4]Ibid., 305.

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government, without minimizing the necessity of order.[5]

While making a case for the political and moral superiority of democracy from a Christian standpoint, Thomas remains critical of perceived deficiencies in democratic government. Thomas sees weaknesses in democratic citizens and criticizes the tendency of democracies to promote an excessive individualism.[6] Yet Thomas is convinced that Christianity can help society overcome such deficiencies.[7] This argument for the link between Christianity and political democracy encourages an "activist" Christianity. Christian faith does not simply sanction political democracy and then leave it to its own devices. In Thomas' view, Christians have an obligation to help make democracy work. For Thomas, Christians help primarily in providing firm foundations for basic democratic tenets such as the dignity and worth of all persons. A number of other mid-twentieth century discussions linking Christianity with democracy also tend to support an "activist" Christianity.[8]

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[5]Ibid., 287-292.

[6]Ibid., 292-295.

[7]Ibid., 295-305.

[8]E. Clinton Gardner, Biblical Faith and Social Ethics (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). John C. Bennett, Christians and the State (New York: Scribner's, 1958). Reinhold Niebuhr, see Chapter VII.

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Given our concern to mine Christian political-
ethical resources in order to come to some understanding
of a morally adequate conception of democracy, two other
features of Thomas' discussion of Christianity and
democracy deserve mention. At one point Thomas uses the
provocative phrase, "the Christian conception of
democracy."[9] This phrase seems to imply both that a
variety of conceptions of democracy exist and that there
is a "Christian conception of democracy." Our analytic
appetites are whetted. What might the Christian
conception of democracy look like, how might it contrast
with other conceptions of democracy, and how might it help
us decide the relative weight to give to majoritarian and
minority-protection concerns in democracy? Thomas
disappoints us, providing only clues and partial answers
to the meaning of his provocative phrase.

Despite our disappointment with this aspect of
Thomas' Christian conception of democracy, another feature
of his discussion proves a bit more helpful. Thomas
writes, "the purpose of democracy is to serve the common
good of all the citizens without bestowing advantages upon
any privileged group."[10] This suggests that the concept
of the "common good" is essential to "the" Christian
conception of democracy. In fact, it seems to suggest

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[9]Thomas, 292.

[10]Ibid., 284.

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that Christian support for political democracy is grounded in some notion of the common good. Throughout this work we consider whether the meaning of the common good will aid us in our attempt to decide the issues between majority rule and minority rights in a morally adequate view of democracy.

However, a problem arises when we look to the conception of the common good as an important element in a morally adequate conception of democracy. The problem is that "the common good" does not seem to hold a central place in every Christian political-ethical discussion of democracy. By including the common good in his Christian conception of democracy, Thomas provides an interesting contrast with a more recent discussion of Christianity and democracy. Paul Sigmund, writing about Catholic political thought, traces its development from an indifference to particular forms of government, so long as they promoted the common good, to a "recognition of the moral superiority of democratic government."[11] Sigmund argues that this recognition of the moral superiority of political democracy became the generally accepted position of the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council, though a movement towards this position has roots in the social thought of Pope Leo XIII.

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[11]Paul E. Sigmund, "The Catholic Tradition and Modern Democracy," <u>The Review of Politics</u> 49 (Fall 1987), 547.

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The respective emphases Thomas and Sigmund give to

the concept of the common good provides an interesting,

and potentially important, contrast between them. Thomas'

Christian conception of democracy identifies the purpose

of democracy as serving the common good. The common good

seems to occupy a necessary place here. Sigmund, on the

other hand, does not explicitly link Christian support for

democracy to the concept of the common good, which by his

own account, occupied a vital place in earlier Catholic

political thought. The democracy which garners the

support of Catholic social thinkers is "modern liberal

constitutional democracy" which entails "universal

suffrage, periodic contested elections, the rule of law

and guarantees of individual rights."[12] Some conception

of the common good may be constructed from these elements,

and one wonders why Sigmund ignores that possibility. He

seems to be part of a perceived trend in official Catholic

social teaching since Vatican II. Charles Curran argues

that the "common good" has not occupied a very significant

and important place in such teaching.[13] He goes on to

argue that despite its relative absence as an explicit

concept, common good notions still find their way into

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[12]Sigmund, 531.

[13]Charles E. Curran, "The Common Good and Official
Catholic Social Teaching," in The Common Good and U.S.
Capitalism, ed. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houck
(Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 113.

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Catholic social teaching. A comparison of these two positions of Christian support for political democracy makes us wonder about the importance of some explicit conception of the common good for a morally adequate, Christian conception of democracy, and about the potential impact particular understandings of the common good have for such a conception of democracy.

Thomas and Sigmund, along with many other Christian political ethical thinkers, do agree that the Christian faith provides support for political democracy. Yet their ambiguity about the notion of a Christian conception of democracy has more than simply theoretical importance. Beginning with the premise of Christian support for political democracy, one can argue that Christian persons have some obligation to promote the well-being of democracy. If this is the case, then they ought to be looking for ways to fulfill this obligation. One way Christians might promote the well-being of political democracy is by bringing the intellectual resources of Christian political-ethical thought to bear upon important issues in democratic political theory, such as the issue between majority rule and minority rights in a morally adequate conception of democracy. Might Christian political thought help the Christian community, and perhaps the wider community, construct a conception of democracy congruent with deeply-held moral and theological convictions?

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The issues here are not merely theoretical. An understanding of the meaning of democracy, of what democracy should be, informs Christian political action. Without some content given to the concept of democracy, Christian support for this form of political governance, and the obligations concomitant with such support, have little practical meaning. Further, differing models or conceptions of democracy represent differing configurations of moral principles and moral commitments. Without some critical reflection on these models, Christian persons are left without adequate moral action guides, which seem an essential feature of any adequate political ethic.

Unfortunately, our analysis of Thomas and Sigmund provides some evidence that Christian theological-ethical discussions of political democracy have not engaged democratic political theory deeply enough to offer much help in critically reflecting on the concept of "democracy." While such discussions often present forceful, cogent and convincing cases for viewing political democracy as an appropriate political expression of the Christian message of faith, they remain unclear about the more exact obligations involved in such support. We are often left wondering what, more precisely, the asserted relationship between Christianity and political democracy means in terms of direction for political-ethical action.

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Crucial questions remain unanswered in these discussions. Are there differing conceptions or models of democracy, and are certain conceptions more congenial to the Christian faith than others? Do other important theo-logically-grounded ethical principles and concepts such as the common good, or justice, or the social expression of sin, help decide which of the contrasting models of dem-ocracy are more congenial to the Christian faith, and if so, how? In reading the discussions of political democracy in recent Christian ethics one is hardly made aware that such issues remain unresolved. However, our brief discussion of Thomas and Sigmund also gives us some hope that if we dig deeply enough into the Christian political-ethical literature on democracy, we might find resources that can be of help in deciding about the elements of an adequate normative conception of democracy. In some cases the issues we want to address might be implicitly addressed in the literature. In any case, we want to determine if the normative material in Christian political-ethical discussions of democracy can provide guidance in constructing a morally adequate conception of democracy.

In order to decide what help we might find, we first need to consult democratic political theory to gain a sharper grasp of the issues involved in conceptualizing democracy. Within the field of political theory the

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conception of political democracy remains a topic of
intense debate and discussion.

Democratic Political Theory

Even a cursory reading of some of the major works in
democratic theory compels one to recognize the complexity
involved in conceptualizing democracy. Conceptions of
democracy in democratic political theory include both
descriptive and normative judgements. Further, the
descriptive and normative judgements involve various
levels of specificity. The complexity of the discussions
regarding democracy has an order to it, however. In
reading democratic political theory, one finds some broad
agreement about areas of consensus and of conflict in
debates about the meaning and purpose of democracy.

Democratic theorists tend to distinguish descriptive
and normative judgements.[14] While making this
distinction, many democratic theorists nevertheless weave
the two types of judgements together. Robert Dahl, for
example, writes in a recent book:

> democratic theory is not only a large enterprise -
> normative, empirical, philosophical, sympathetic,
> critical, historical, utopianistic, all at once - but
> complexly interconnected.[15]

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[14]Neil Riemer, The Revival of Democratic Theory (New
York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1962). Giovanni Sartori,
Democratic Theory (New York: Praeger, 1965). Robert A.
Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1989).

[15]Dahl, Democracy, 8.

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This statement gains added significance when one considers the largely descriptive nature of Dahl's earlier work in democratic theory. Normative judgements were most often left implicit, and often took the form of hypothetical imperatives based on the more explicit descriptive work.[16]

The interweaving of descriptive and normative judgements is significant in that it throws open the doors to dialogue with ethically-oriented political theory, including political theory rooted in theological-ethical discussion. One of the main purposes of the entire project being carried out in these pages is to foster a more adequate dialogue between theological-ethical discussions of democracy and the discussions of democracy in recent political theory. Theologically-oriented political ethicists need to walk through the door opened by the interweaving of descriptive and normative elements in recent democratic theory, not simply to improve their theoretical work, but also to provide more adequate direction and understanding to persons of faith seeking to be faithful to the gospel in their political life, and possibly to others.

The distinction between normative and descriptive judgements represents an important aspect of the

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[16]Robert A. Dahl, _A Preface to Democratic Theory_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

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discussion in democratic political theory regarding

conceptions of democracy. Furthermore, both types of

judgements are made with varying degrees of specificity.

Works in democratic theory focusing primarily on

descriptive judgements refer to a wide range of relatively

specific facts, but also utilize theories of varying

generalities to help describe and explain more fully that

data.[17] One also finds varying degrees of specificity in

more normatively-oriented democratic theory as one moves

from general moral principles to more specific moral

rules.[18] Our concern here is with normative democratic

political theory as it identifies important principles

needed in a conception of political democracy. We want to

know: (1) what principles are generally seen to provide

some common content to "democracy;" and (2) the principles

about which democratic theorists disagree as they

conceptualize "democracy."

Ranney and Kendall's essay, "Democracy: Confusion

and Agreement," provides a helpful starting point for our

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[17]Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man: Social
Bases of Politics (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor
Books, 1963). Lipset is a good example of one who uses
theory to help explain a wealth of data.

[18]Thomas L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress,
Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1983), provides a good discussion of
differing levels of moral discourse.

discussion.[19] They argue that "democracy" often functions as a honorific word "in that it evokes such pleasant associations in most of us that we wish to identify ourselves and our ideas with it."[20] Such usage stands in the way of conceptual clarity. Where this trap is avoided, some broad areas of both agreement and dis-agreement about the meaning of democracy in political theory can be identified.

Ranney and Kendall locate a general consensus re-garding the meaning of democracy in three principles: 1) political equality or the equal right to participate in the decision-making processes of the community; 2) a government responsive to the will of the people; and 3) rule by the majority rather than by a minority. In light of the fact that the whole issue of majority rule provides a major focus for disagreement as well, this third principle might better be thought of as giving some preference to the rule of majorities over against the rule of minorities.

As stated, Ranney and Kendall identify the principle of majority rule as the focus for disagreement in democratic theory regarding the meaning of democracy.

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[19]Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, "Democracy: Confusion and Agreement," Western Political Quarterly, IV (September 1951), 430-439.

[20]Ibid., 431.

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More specifically, the issue as described by these political theorists is whether democracy ought to be considered as embodying the principle of unlimited majority rule as against some form of limited majority rule. In the first instance, democracy allows a majority of the community to decide any issue it wishes to decide. The second sense of democracy would limit the decision of majorities to some range of issues, excluding certain issues from majority decision-making, e.g. some basic rights. In this second sense, democracy still gives preference to majorities against minorities in decision-making, but only regarding certain kinds of decisions.

The Ranney and Kendall article remains helpful in encouraging us to identify patterns of agreement and disagreement in political theory over the meaning of democracy. However, given the work in democratic theory since its publication, the article does not adequately identify these areas of consensus and conflict, particularly with regard to the latter. A look at more recent treatments of democracy helps us see why this is the case.

Equality and popular sovereignty continue to be identified by prominent political theorists as fundamental notions in an adequate conception of political democracy.[21] If we understand "popular sovereignty" in

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[21]Dahl, Preface, 34. Sartori, Democratic Theory, 51.

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terms of a government responsive to the people, then we have something close to Ranney and Kendall's view of the consensus. William Riker, in <u>Liberalism Against Populism</u>, modifies the list of basic principles by identifying participation, liberty and equality as the crucial attributes of democracy.[22] The addition of liberty to the list of basic principles seems more a case of making explicit what is sometimes implicit in other theorists. Thus Riker's view can be considered part of the basic consensus.

The consensus identified by Ranney and Kendall is made more nuanced and complex in recent political theory, as a comparison of the views of Robert Dahl and Giovanni Sartori demonstrates. Sartori calls the generally agreed-upon principles forming the core of an adequate conception of democracy "normative ideals," part of "the deontology of democracy."[23] For Sartori, these ideals "have a polemic function, a countervailing role, for "an ought is not meant to take the place of an is."[24] "Oughts" exist to challenge reality, not to become reality. They

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[22]William H. Riker, <u>Liberalism Against Populism</u> (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1982), 4-8.

[23]Sartori, <u>Democratic Theory</u>, 52.

[24]Ibid., 64.

generate intermediary principles which provide guides to political action.[25] This account of normative principles and their function would be considered inadequate by most ethicists. The very notion of a moral norm implies that one has some obligation to actualize the state of affairs pointed to by the norm.

Sartori combines his normative judgements with descriptive ones in order to provide a more specific account of existing democracies. For Sartori, modern democracies hinge on majority rule, elective mechanisms, and representative transmission of power.[26] One could understand these principles as among those intermediate principles which move us toward the deontology of democracy. Sartori defines democracy as "a political system in which the people exercise power to the extent that they are able to change their governors, but not to the extent of governing themselves."[27] This definition serves both normative and descriptive functions. Furthermore, democracies are open variants of the elite principle.[28] The purpose of elections in democracies is not to maximize democracy, but to select leaders.[29] In

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[25]Ibid., 65. [26]Ibid., 24.

[27]Ibid., 85. [28]Ibid., 85.

[29]Ibid., 108.

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summary, modern liberal democracy "is not, in short, a system of self-government but a system of control and limitation of government."[30]

Sartori's account of democracy, in the way that it uses the fundamental principles of democracy, suggests that perhaps the apparent consensus about democracy within democratic theory is not as uniform as suggested earlier. As we shall see below, other democratic theorists do not put the distance between the fundamental normative principles and the existing institutions of democracy that Sartori does. Sartori justifies the moral desirability of democratic governments by appealing to fundamental principles, namely equality and popular sovereignty. Yet for Sartori, democracies do not "embody" these principles in any full sense. They remain in the background, serving as countervailing forces, as sentries guarding the castle of existing democracies lest they be besieged by un-democratic forces from without or within. As we compare this view with that of Dahl we seem to find that the conflicts within democratic theory are more subtle than Ranney and Kendall imagined.

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[30]Sartori, "Democracy," in <u>International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences</u>, ed. David L. Sills, Volume IV (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1968), 115.

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Dahl, like Sartori, identifies the fundamental principles of political equality and popular sovereignty as the core of democracy.[31] From this foundation, Dahl constructs a model of democracy which includes more specific criteria for identifying this form of civil government. In Democracy and Its Critics, Dahl argues for the moral desirability of democracy by relating the idea of equal intrinsic worth;[32] the concomitant principle of equal consideration of interests;[33] a presumption of personal autonomy, i.e, the assumption that each person is the best judge of his or her own good and/or interests;[34] and a strong principle of equality, i.e., the assumption that a substantial portion of adults are equally qualified to govern themselves.[35] For Dahl, each person is of equal intrinsic worth and thus each person's good and interests ought to be considered equally in social decision-making processes. When one combines this with the presumption of personal autonomy, one can justifiably adopt a strong principle of equality and in so doing, one arrives at the necessity for democratic processes in making binding social decisions.[36]

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[31]Dahl, Preface, 34.

[32]Dahl, Democracy, 85.

[33]Ibid., 86.

[34]Ibid., 100.

[35]Ibid., 97.

[36]Ibid., 105.

Dahl understands government as that set of institutions which makes the binding collective decisions for an association of people. A democracy is an association in which this decision-making process has certain characteristics, characteristics which embody the strong principle of equality.[37] The criteria Dahl uses to identify democratic decision-making processes are: effective participation, voting equality at the decisive stage, enlightened understanding, final control of the agenda by the people, and inclusiveness.[38] Notice the contrast with Sartori. Dahl, at least in his recent work, emphasizes and elaborates on the normative side of his democratic theory in a way Sartori does not. He combines this with a rather thorough consideration of existing democracies.

Dahl, like Sartori, realizes that "the democratic process must somehow be actualized in the real world - in actually existing procedures, institutions, associations, states, and so on."[39] Dahl uses the term "polyarchy" as an umbrella for his description of the needed procedures,

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[37]Ibid., 106-108.

[38]Dahl, _Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 6. Dahl, _Democracy_, 109ff.

[39]Dahl, _Democracy_, 117.

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institutions and associations. Dahl distinguishes small-scale and large-scale democracies. As one searches history for governments of nation-states which appear to approach democracy, one finds certain institutions: elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, and associational autonomy.[40] Governments in which one finds these characteristic institutions developed beyond a certain threshold are "polyarchies." Dahl asserts that the institutions of polyarchy are necessary to democracy on a large-scale.[41] While polyarchy describes the set of necessary conditions for large-scale democracy, the actual existence of those conditions does not guarantee the full achievement of democracy.[42]

Again, the contrast with Sartori proves illuminating. Dahl thinks the institutions of polyarchy provide a necessary, if imperfect, embodiment of demo-cratic principles.[43] At the same time, Dahl acknowledges that the normative side of democratic theory continually

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[40]Ibid., 221.

[41]Ibid., 177, 221.

[42]Ibid., 223.

[43]Ibid., 222. Dahl correlates polyarchal institutions with democratic principles here.

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challenges polyarchal regimes. We might appropriately identify Dahl's democratic theory as a "degrees-of-democracy" approach.[44] In other words, the fundamental principles forming the core of "democracy" can be more or less actualized in the world. Sartori's approach seems to differ from this, though he agrees that the same fundamental principles of political equality, popular sovereignty and liberty form the foundation for conceptualizing democracy. It differs in that one does not attain degrees of the normative deontology of democracy, only degrees of derivative democratic principles. Principles are correctives rather than action guides.

Our look at the contrasting democratic theories of Sartori and Dahl illustrates the way in which similar political-moral principles seem to acquire differing meanings and serve differing functions in different conceptualizations of democracy. We have seen diverse conceptions of democracy constructed from similar foundational principles.[45] We have also begun to see that

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[44]Frank Cunningham, <u>Democratic Theory and Socialism</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Cunningham coined the phrase "degrees-of-democracy."

[45]Ibid., 31. Cunningham refers to a study which identified 311 definitions of democracy in literature stretching from Plato to the 1950's.

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the areas of disagreement in democratic theory are deeper and more subtle than Ranney and Kendall suggest. Seeming agreement on principles can mask a more subtle disagreement. In the midst of this, we need not wonder why some political theorists consider democracy "an essentially contested concept."[46]

The contrast between these discussions of democracy and those we find in theologically-based political ethical literature could hardly be exaggerated. This literature gives insufficient attention to the nuances and complexities of the concept of "democracy." If theological ethicists are to provide more adequate direction for Christian political action, then a greater appreciation for, and dialogue with, democratic theory seems necessary.

Fortunately, Ranney and Kendall were correct in thinking that some order could be brought to the conflicts within democratic theory. The debate over the range of possible meanings of "democracy," is not hopelessly complex, though more complex than Ranney and Kendall thought. Alan Ware, in a more recent discussion about the meaning of democracy, writes, "the disputes about the nature of democracy may be classified in terms of four overlapping areas of contest:" (1) majority rule versus

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[46]Alan Ware, The Logic of Party Democracy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), Chapter One.

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minority or consensus rule, (2) political equality versus the maximization of liberty, (3) utilitarian democratic theory versus its opponents, (4) populism versus liberalism.[47] Looking at this list we see that debates over the appropriate conceptions of democracy may involve both normative and descriptive judgements. One might ask whether democracy ought appropriately be described as a system of majority rule or as a system that modifies majority decision-making in order to provide greater protection for political minorities. Might some combination of these two notions provide a more accurate description? One might also consider this issue normatively, i.e., ought the majority in a democracy rule over a nearly unlimited range of issues, or ought democracy, as an ideal form of government, embody an overriding concern for political minorities by adopting another type of decision rule and/or strictly limiting the range of issues to be decided in a political process? The issue as normatively conceived cannot neglect descriptive considerations (e.g. an adequate description of majority rule), yet we will focus on the normative.

Ware provides an agenda of items which can be addressed as the focus for our attempt to forge a more adequate dialogue between Christian political-ethical

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[47]Ware, 3-9.

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theory and democratic political theory. We can ask what direction recent Christian theological-ethical discussions of democracy might point us in trying to decide some of the issues presented by Ware? We have already suggested that, in their defense of democracy, Christian theological-ethical discussions of democracy generally fail to address adequately issues regarding the nature of democracy. In spite of this major shortcoming, these discussions might, nevertheless, provide us resources for entering the debates identified in democratic theory. We need to dig deeply into the thinking of Christian ethicists and ask questions not posed explicitly in the literature.

If Christian ethics is to help clarify the relationship between Christianity and democracy, we need to shift its focus from the generic cases offered for or against democracy out of theological-ethical premises, to utilizing such premises to construct cases for <u>how democracy ought to be conceived</u>, and thus for <u>how it ought to function</u>. We can begin to effect such a shift by seeking to address one of the issues identified by Ware, utilizing the theological-ethical principles already present in recent Christian theological-ethical discussions of democracy. If our cursory analysis of those discussions is accurate, we shall find that they do not explicitly address Ware's issues. Nevertheless,

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important normative material necessary for addressing those issues might be found in the theological-ethical discussions of democracy, if we dig deeply and sensitively enough. We can attempt to use these resources to enter the debate regarding "democracy."

Any of the issues identified by Ware could be fruitfully addressed in the manner suggested. We shall examine the issue political philosopher Michael Walzer has called, "the hardest question in democratic theory,"[48] i.e. the issue of majority rule, or more precisely, the issue of majoritarian as against minority-protection conceptions of democracy. The issue of the place of majority rule and of majoritarianism, more broadly conceived, in the conception of democracy continues to garner a great deal of attention in democratic theory.[49]

The question we will address in the coming chapters, as we examine recent Christian theological-ethical discussions of democracy, shall be the following: To what extent ought democracy be considered a political decision-making process primarily concerned with arriving at

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[48]Michael Walzer, Obligations, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 46.

[49]Elaine Spitz, Majority Rule (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1984). John W. Chapman and Alan Wertheimer, ed., Majorities and Minorities (New York: New York University Press, 1990). Lani Guinier, The Tyranny of the Majority (New York: The Free Press, 1994). We discuss Spitz and Guinier in Chapter VIII.

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decisions which express the will of the majority, to what
extent ought democracy be considered a political decision-
making process primarily concerned with the protection of
political minorities; or to what extent might and ought
these concerns be balanced in a morally adequate
conception of democracy? How might the resources within
recent Christian theological-ethical discussions of
democracy, particularly the theologically-rooted
political-ethical principles found therein, help decide
the issue within the Christian community of faith? We
want to know the appropriate priorities to give major-
tarian and minority-protection concerns in a normatively
adequate conception of democracy rooted in Christian
theological ethics. Each conception of democracy includes
differing moral principles in differing combinations and
with differing emphasis. To identify a morally adequate
conception of democracy might provide more guidance for
moral action and reflection.

We choose the majoritarian/minoritarian issue, then,
not simply because of its continuing importance in demo-
cratic political theory, but also because of its potential
to guide our action and reflection. Thinking about the
majoritarian/minoritarian issue seems particularly timely.
Many reflective persons in the United States wonder how we
shall get along and make decisions as a people in the
midst of our diversity and differences. Such issues are

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even more pressing when one considers places like Bosnia or South Africa, nations trying to decide how to live together and decide their future together. We hope our work here raises issues relevant to the world situation, as well as to Christian political ethics.

Though the world situation gives us some reasons for choosing our topic, we will not address every question about the more precise degrees to which our models of democracy can be actualized. Thus we shall not be very concerned, at least in the majority of this work, with discussions in public choice political theory which raise questions about the very possibility of "majority rule."[50]

Majoritarian and Minoritarian Models of Democracy

Searching for a more adequate dialogue between theological-political ethics and democratic political theory, and having identified the issue around which we seek to foster such dialogue, we are left with two tasks for the remainder of this chapter. First, we must clarify the nature of the debate between majoritarian and minoritarian conceptions or models of political democracy. We seek to do that in the present section. Second, we need to identify our sources for "recent Christian theological-ethical discussions of democracy." That task occupies the final section of this chapter.

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[50]Chapman and Wertheimer, see essays by Shapiro, Meyers, Christiano and Hardin.

Differing conceptions of political democracy represent differing constellations of values and principles. They also tend to prescribe differing sets of political institutions for the embodiment and promotion of those values and principles. The basic distinctions between majoritarian and minoritarian conceptions of democracy are: 1) the prominence each gives to majority rule as an expression of political equality and popular sovereignty, and 2) the range of issues which political majorities are allowed to decide. Majoritarian models of democracy give majority rule a prominent place. Minority-protection models of democracy (which we shall often shorten to "minoritarian democracy") on the other hand, emphasize the apparent dangers of majority rule. Minoritarian models also tend to emphasize the importance of liberty, particularly in the form of freedom from excessive government involvement in the lives of individuals and voluntary associations. Minoritarian democrats argue that political minorities need protection from a potentially overbearing government controlled by political majorities, or sufficient leverage to shape the policies of government in ways that take their interests seriously. As we begin to explore some of the important differences between these contrasting conceptions of democracy we see that other issues identified by Ware are also involved, e.g., the relative importance each conception gives to

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political equality and the maximization of liberty. We

need to explore more fully these two contrasting

conceptions of political democracy. We also need to

explore some attempts in democratic theory to integrate

the concerns of each conception.

Abraham Lincoln, in his First Inaugural Address

March 4, 1861, provides one rationale for majoritarian

democracy.

> Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a
> permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that
> rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism
> in some form is all that is left.[51]

Here one finds implicit what perhaps has become the

crucial argument for majoritarian democracy, i.e., the

need for positive government action. Anarchy represents

an inability to take any governing action whatsoever.

Despotism represents unaccountable governing action, which

might greatly harm the citizenry. Majoritarian democrats

"begin with a belief in strong, positive government as a

necessary force for the solution of problems."[52] Sorauf

is describing here the party government position, a

primary model for majoritarian democracy in modern, large-

scale nation-states.

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[51]Abraham Lincoln, Selected Speeches, Messages and Letters, ed., T. Harry Williams (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), 144.

[52]Frank J. Sorauf, Party Politics in America, 3d ed. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1976), 387.

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A number of recent political theorists argue for a
majoritarian conception of political democracy.[53] Others
offer models and even arguments for those models without
necessarily endorsing them.[54] We begin our examination of
this conception of democracy with a model of democracy
offered by Ranney and Kendall.

Ranney and Kendall intend their model to be a
logical result of tracing the implications of what they
understand to be fundamental characteristics of demo-
cratic government. They consciously set out to construct
a model which is "a conception of the most democratic
government possible, and not necessarily a conception of
the best government possible."[55] Thus they intend to be
descriptive, though normative elements enter in. Their
approach is a degrees-of-democracy approach, i.e.,
governments are more democratic as they approach the

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[53]E.E. Schattschneider, Party Governemnt (New York:
Rinehart, 1942) and The Semi-Sovereign People (Hinsdale,
IL: Dryden Press, 1975. Originally published in 1960).
James MacGregor Burns, The Deadlock of Democracy (Engle-
wood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963) and The Power To
Lead (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984). Henry Steele
Commager, Majority Rule and Minority Rights (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1943).

[54]Austin Ranney, The Doctrine of Responsible Party
Government (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press,
1962). Arend Lijphart, Democracies (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1984).

[55]Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, "Basic
Principles for a Model of Democracy," in Empirical
Democratic Theory, ed., Charles F. Cnudde and Deane
Neubauer (Chicago: Markham Publishing, 1969), 44.

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features of their model. In other words, Ranney and Kendall would label any polity a "democracy" once it embodied some of the characteristics of their model beyond a certain threshold.

According to Ranney and Kendall, a democracy must have at least three characteristics: (1) those who hold office in society must, in some sense, be ready to do what the people wish; (2) each member of the community should have, in some sense, an equal chance to participate in community decision-making; (3) when enfranchised members of the community disagree, the majority has the last word, in some sense.[56] Ranney and Kendall translate these characteristics into four principles: popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule.[57] These principles provide the pillars of a more fully developed model of political democracy. We ought to note that the term "principles" has normative connotations, and Ranney and Kendall seem comfortable with this.

The meaning and status given to the principle of majority rule in this model of democracy makes it a majoritarian model. Ranney and Kendall characterize the debate in democratic theory between absolute majority rule

[56]Ibid., 46.

[57]Ibid., 46.

and limited majority rule as "the greatest single theoretical controversy about the nature of democracy."[58] They understand absolute majority to mean, simply, that when opinion is divided, the opinion of the majority ought always to prevail. They go on to assert that a majoritarian, "as a democrat,"

> naturally prefers unanimous decisions to nearly unanimous ones, and nearly unanimous ones to decisions opposed by a considerable minority, and decisions opposed by a considerable minority to decisions opposed by a minority accounting for nearly half the population.[59]

Further, a majoritarian

> knows that a society... permanently divided between a permanent majority and a permanent minority, so that all issues become issues between these two groups, is a society in which democracy is about to become impossible to operate.[60]

These explanations of the majoritarian model of democracy seem designed, in part, to make the model more normatively appealing. Ranney and Kendall make other gestures in this same direction. They assert that their model does not require political majorities to make all community decisions, only that majorities have the right to decide which decisions to make. This model does not claim that mere numbers determine what is right, but claims a connection between numbers and freedom.

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[58]Ibid., 58

[59]Ibid., 52

[60]Ibid., 52.

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In response to those who advocate some form of limited majority rule, an absolute majoritarian argues that there are no logical alternatives between majority rule and minority rule, and that only the former is consistent with other democratic principles. A majoritarian, as defined by this model, does not deny that majorities ought to exercise self-restraint, and in fact believes that majorities are capable of exercising such restraint often enough.[61]

Ranney and Kendall's essay is particularly deficient in its neglect of a crucial feature of recent debates about majoritarian democracy, namely, a discussion of the important role of political parties in democracy. Ranney's other work in democratic theory tries to remedy this situation. In The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government, Ranney provides an insightful analysis of early work on the party government model of majoritarian democracy without endorsing this model himself. His own position acknowledges the importance of majority rule in democracy, but rejects the need for strong parties as an institutional implication of majoritarian democracy. Ranney argues for his position in two ways. On the one hand, he asserts that the strong centralized political parties needed for party government cut against important

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[61]Ibid., 51-60.

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American values.[62] This argument lacks the normative

force of his second one, which is that the current weak

party system in the U.S. adequately provides for

majoritarian democracy without exacerbating political

confrontation.[63]

The position which Ranney analyzes without finally

endorsing, i.e., the party government view, provides us

with another majoritarian model built on premises similar

to those offered by Ranney and Kendall. The central

feature of the party government position is briefly stated

by E.E. Schattschneider, one of its chief advocates.

> A major party mobilizes a majority in order to take
> control of the government and accepts responsibility
> for the whole conduct of public policy. These are the
> significant processes of democratic politics.[64]

In contrast to Ranney, Schattschneider does not believe

that this process simply exacerbates confrontation.

Rather, in trying to form a majority, political parties

must, "prepare to do business with a great variety of

people."[65] This tends toward political accommodation and

compromise. More recent political history has not always

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[62]Ranney, Responsible Party Government, 160. Curing
the Mischiefs of Faction (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1975), 7-8.

[63]Ranney, Curing, 197-203.

[64]Schattschneider, Party Government, 63.

[65]Ibid., 62.

supported Schattschneider's thesis, however. Both major
political parties in the United States have displayed
tendencies to move noticably left or right of center.
Furthermore, the kind of party discipline Schattschneider
hoped for has become even more difficult to achieve given
the rise of television. Individual candidates are less
dependent on parties when they can appeal directly to
voters through the media.

The creators of these models of majoritarian
democracy were not primarily concerned to construct
normatively appealing models. Yet, both the models
offered attempt to avoid an obvious moral objection to
majoritarian democracy, i.e., that majorities might take
extreme positions which could eventually violate important
socially-affirmed moral principles. In other ways these
models provide material out of which a more morally norm-
ative case for majoritarian democracy could be
constructed. As our concern is with normative issues, we
must identify some of the moral claims these models make
for a majoritarian conception of democracy.

The normative case for majoritarian democracy
revolves around three basic premises. (1) The primary
argument forwarded on behalf of majoritarian democracy is
that majoritarian democracy values the ability of govern-
ment to act positively on behalf of the common good or
public interest. This model encourages the formation of

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majorities which can formulate and implement consistent policies they view as furthering the public interest. If or when a significant number of citizens begins to think that such policies or policy directions no longer foster the public interest, then they may seek to form a new majority which then has the opportunity to formulate and implement new policies.[66] (2) Majoritarian democracy more adequately embodies the four democratic principles identified by Ranney and Kendall, which provide an important part of the moral substance for these models of democracy. The principle of political equality seeks to embody a broader moral principle of human equality.[67] The principles of popular sovereignty and popular consultation promote the morally appealing view of the human as responsible and as capable of moral and intellectual development. Majoritarian democracy values political participation as an important method of self-development. Such participation can also lead persons to a greater sense of community, a sense of community rooted in the proposition that, in important respects, all human persons are created equal. (3) Majoritarians argue that these morally desirable states of affairs can be gained without

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[66]Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, Politics, Economics and Welfare (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 336-365.

[67]Dahl, Democracy, 9f.

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riding roughshod over political minorities. Political parties, whether strong or weak, are seen to provide institutional mechanisms for compromise.

A majoritarian conception of democracy, then, embodies a certain configuration of moral principles and important values. The value of freedom is noticeably absent in this description of the configuration of principles and values embodied in a majoritarian model of democracy. Majoritarians certainly include freedom as an important feature of democratic governance. Ranney and Kendall assert that majoritarian democrats insist on a connection between "numbers and human freedom."[68] The freedom valued by majoritarian democrats, however, must be consistent with the value of governmental ability to act on behalf of the public interest, and with the important features of the majority-forming processes. It cannot simply be defined, at least at its core, as freedom from governmental interference. On this issue, a basic contrast can be drawn between majoritarian and minority-protection or minoritarian models of democracy.

Lincoln provided a brief rationale for a majoritarian conception of democracy. President James Madison provides a brief rationale for a minoritarian conception of democracy. In the Federalist Papers, Madison expresses some of the concerns often found in

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[68]Ranney and Kendall, "Basic Principles," 54.

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constructions of and arguments for minoritarian democracy.

> When a majority is included in a faction, the form of
> popular government... enables it to sacrifice to its
> ruling passion or interest both the public good and
> the rights of other citizens. To secure the public
> good and the private rights against the danger of such
> faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit
> and form of popular government, is then the great
> object to which our inquiries are directed. (#10)

> It is of great importance in a republic not only to
> guard the society against the oppression of its
> rulers, but to guard one part of the society against
> the injustice of the other part.... If a majority be
> united by a common interest, the rights of the
> minority will be insecure. (#51)[69]

More fully-developed minoritarian models of

democracy can be found in recent writings in democratic

theory. Models of democracy which promote unanimity as a

decision-making rule represent the logical extreme of

minoritarian democracy. After all, what can offer a

person or group more protection from the action of the

larger group to which they belong than a veto over any

group action. Unanimity also seems to offer a maximum

amount of freedom, if freedom is understood as freedom

from coerced action required by the group or community to

which one belongs. Coerced action would be ruled out in a

community under a rule of unanimity.

The democratic theory of James Buchanan and Gordon

Tullock in The Calculus of Consent considers unanimity the

norm from which other decision-making rules are

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[69]James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay,
The Federalist Papers, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York:
Mentor Books, 1961).

compromises with necessity. Buchanan and Tullock utilize
analytic tools from economics to discuss the "logical
foundations of constitutional democracy." They argue that
only when one introduces decision-making costs into a
calculus of choosing decision-making rules for a community
can any departure from the unanimity rule be rationally
justified. Under unanimity, imposed external costs would
be zero.[70]

> The individualistic theory of the constitution that we
> have been able to develop assigns a central role to a
> single decision-making rule - that of general
> consensus or unanimity. The other possible rules for
> choice-making are introduced as variants from the
> unanimity rule. These variants will be rationally
> chosen, not because they will produce "better"
> collective decisions (they will not), but rather
> because, on balance, the sheer weight of the costs
> involved in reaching decisions unanimously dictates
> some departure from the "ideal" rule.[71]

According to Buchanan and Tullock, once a community
departs from unanimity, nothing sharply distinguishes one
decision-making rule from another, including majority
rule.[72] Further, the range of actions which should be
subject to collective decision-making ought to be limited,
and more inclusive decision-making rules ought to be
instituted for certain types of decisions.[73]

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[70]James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, The Calculus of
Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy
(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 85
and 64.

[71]Ibid., 96.   [72]Ibid., 81.

[73]Ibid., 57-58 and 73-74.

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Arend Lijphart provides another minoritarian model
of democracy which can be seen as an interesting variation
on Buchanan and Tullock. In Democracies Lijphart
describes what he terms "the consensus model of
democracy."[74] Democracies which fit this model disperse
and limit power.[75] In particular, consensus democracies
provide for power-sharing arrangements in which government
action requires the agreement of important groups.[76] This
can be understood as a unanimity decision-making rule
where the "individuals" who must give their consent are
the important groups in the community. Lijphart argues
that such democracies are more appropriate than
majoritarian democracies in "plural societies," i.e.,
societies sharply divided into virtually separate
subsocieties.[77] This model of minoritarian democracy
places positive value on government action when that
action is agreed upon by all the significant groups within
a society.

These two models provide helpful insights into some
central concerns of minoritarian democracy. Minoritarian
democrats distrust majority rule, even when they allow a
place for it. They tend to advocate a view of democracy
as "limited government." While limited government admits
of a range of possibilities, minoritarian democracy tends

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[74]Lijphart, Chapter 2. [75]Ibid., 30.

[76]Ibid., 23. [77]Ibid., 22.

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to favor "strictly limited governement." This is not as
true for Lijphart's consensus model of democracy as it is
for Buchanan and Tullock's model, though the group veto
built into Lijphart's model would tend to limit government
action. Strictly limited government is not as limited as
Robert Nozick's minimal state, which provides only for
common defense and the enforcement of the rules of
exchange, but it can tend in that direction.[78] Advocacy
of strictly limited government and distrust of majorities
are rooted, in part, in the high value minoritarians give
to freedom, understood primarily as noninterference of
government in important aspects of human life. They are
also rooted in a view of the human person which takes
seriously human propensities to abuse power and to give
greater weight to one's own concerns. Madison seems to
root his advocacy of minoritarian democracy in both these
ideas.

These concerns are embodied in the more fully-
developed model of democracy offered by Giovanni Sartori.
Sartori's democratic theory has been characterized as,
"perhaps the best known defense of democracy as the
maximization of negative freedom."[79] Sartori asserts that

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[78]Robert Nozick, <u>Anarchy State and Utopia</u> (New York:
Basic Books, 1974), 26.

[79]Ware, 182, n. 10.

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"democrats... have accepted the principle that freedom is the end and democracy the means."[80] He understands modern democracy not as "a system of self-government but a system of control and limitation of government."[81] Sartori's characterization of majorities and majority rule seem to place his model of democracy in the minoritarian camp. Sartori asserts, "liberty for the individual means nothing if it does not imply the right to pursue a course of conduct and to hold and advocate views which do not have the approval of the majority."[82] Many majoritarians would have little difficulty with this statement. They consider the role of political minorities as the loyal opposition crucial to the democratic process. However, Sartori takes his position further. In contrast to Ranney and Kendall, Sartori includes "the safeguarding of minorities" in his list of the essential features of a democracy.[83] While majorities may have the right to govern, and while they need such a right if democracies are not to be paralyzed, they must be limited if they are to function as truly democratic majorities.[84] Again, Sartori's main reason

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[80]Sartori, Democratic Theory, 361.

[81]Sartori, "Democracy," 115.

[82]Sartori, Democratic Theory, 239.

[83]Ibid., 237.

[84]Ibid., 239.

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for taking this position is that "without liberty, democracy has no meaning."[85]

Sartori's concern for safeguarding minorities seems connected with his view of democracy as an open variant of the elite principle, a position akin to one developed earlier by Joseph Schumpeter.[86] Democracy, like every other method for governing modern nation-states, involves rule by leaders, and the leaders are necessarily a minority of the population. The crucial question for Sartori is that of accountability.[87]

> If the law of numbers, which is a means, is taken for an end, then it destroys capable leadership and government becomes anonymous, irresponsible and amateurish.[88]

Sartori might argue that minorities need protection if needed political leadership is to develop. Liberty, in Sartori's democratic theory, safeguards minorities, and minorities so protected can develop leaders.

Like their majoritarian counterparts, minoritarian models of democracy embody certain configurations of moral principles and important values. Freedom, understood

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[85]Ibid., 461.

[86]Sartori, _Democratic Theory_, 85. Joseph A. Schumpeter, _Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy_ (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950).

[87]Sartori, _Democratic Theory_, 96ff.

[88]Ibid., 105.

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primarily in terms of limiting what government can demand of persons and groups, probably belongs at the top of the list of moral principles prized by minoritarian democrats. Equality might also be included as a value of minoritarian democracy but equality primarily considered as equality of opportunity. Minoritarian democrats also value the human as a developing person, though often emphasizing the variety of human projects capable of developing human potential. In other words, one reason for asserting the importance of freedom is that such freedom allows for individuals to develop as they can and desire to, thus allowing leaders and other elites to emerge. A minoritarian conception of democracy holds these elite leaders accountable, but also asserts the necessity for finding ways to allow such leaders to grow and be identified. Minoritarian democrats value the ability of government to act decisively but across a more limited range of issues than majoritarians. Community is also a value minoritarians share with majoritarians, but here again the understandings of the term seem to diverge. For majoritarians, the political process can build a sense of community, and some measure of the sense of community can emerge from coerced action. Minoritarians seem to prefer communities independent of the state. What ought to be clear from our discussion of this configuration of principles and values, in comparison with the majoritarian

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models of democracy, is that on the surface both models acknowledge the importance of similar moral principles. However, the way these contrasting models understand these various moral principles and important values often differs, as does the relative weight given to the principles and values.

As might be expected, a number of democratic theorists have tried to find positions which mediate between majoritarian and minoritarian conceptions of democracy. Both Henry Mayo and Laurence Stapleton argue that one cannot finally separate the principle of majority rule from other principles of democracy. In Stapleton's words, "majority rule must be taken within the context of freedom and equality."[89] Mayo, too, considers political freedom, by which he means freedom for effective political choice entailing freedoms of speech, assembly, et. al., one of the fundamental principles of democracy.[90] These positions may seem nothing more than Sartori rehashed. They are distinct from Sartori's position in that they fail to give the principle of freedom the prominent place Sartori does. Neither of these writers invokes the notion

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[89]Laurence Stapleton, The Design of Democracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 68.

[90]Henry Mayo, An Introduction to Democratic Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 64-67, 183-185.

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of democracy as a variant of the elite principle. While
Mayo and Stapleton agree that the principle of freedom
limits what majorities ought to do, they propose different
ways of trying to limit the ability of majorities to act
improperly. Stapleton argues that "the conditions that
allow a true majority to form are the same as those to
which minorities owe protection," namely access to
information, and rights of assembly and expression.[91] She
goes on to argue that these conditions ought to be part of
the laws and constitution of democratic regimes.[92] Mayo,
though he links the formation of political majorities with
a "free political process"[93] emphasizes social and moral
restraints on majorities as distinct from constitutional
and legal restraints.

> The rights and liberties we enjoy are therefore and
> can only be, in any democracy, at the pleasure of the
> large majority, or - what is the same thing - they
> exist because of moral and political restraints,
> voluntarily observed by the great majority of
> legislators and public.[94]

While these attempts to relate majoritarian and
minoritarian values, principles and concerns in a unified
conception of democracy point us in a fruitful direction,

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[91]Stapleton, 74-75.

[92]Ibid., 76-98.

[93]Mayo, 187.

[94]Ibid., 205.

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they seem inadequate as they stand. A third democratic

theorist who attempts to mediate between our two

conceptions of democracy helps us identify these

inadequacies. Thomas Landon Thorson in The Logic of

Democracy also thinks we need

> a conception of democracy which makes no institutional
> principle supreme but which holds that the principles
> [of democracy, including majority rule, minority
> rights, political equality and popular sovereignty]
> are mutually interdependent and essentially equal.[95]

Thorson thinks that the issue between whether constitu-

tional and legal checks or social and moral checks on

majorities are more appropriate is a matter of consulting

empirical evidence and thus is not a matter for

"democratic theory" at all.[96] Majorities ought to be

restrained, in Thorson's view, but the best way to do this

can only be determined by looking at what works.

Thorson may be right in asserting that the best way

to decide whether constitutional-legal checks on

majorities ought to be instituted is primarily a matter of

looking at what works in any particular society. However,

to ask whether such checks are normatively appropriate,

and determining the kinds of checks on majorities that are

normatively appropriate, has a place in normative

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[95]Thomas Landon Thorson, The Logic of Democracy
(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 161.

[96]Ibid., 158.

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democratic theory. How ought the relationship between differing democratic principles be understood and what functions should these principles serve? Stapleton, Mayo, and Thorson, at best, cut around the edges of these issues. Simply asserting that the various democratic principles are equal leaves us suspended between majoritarian and minoritarian democracy without an adequate sense of direction. Simply asserting that important democratic principles and values such as freedom, equality, participation, human development, and human community, are on par leaves us wondering what we ought to desire and expect from political democracy. It also leaves us wondering what we ought to do to improve existing democratic systems. How ought we to understand these principles and values and how might we integrate our models, if that is what we ought to do? We need a more encompassing normative perspective which helps us weigh important democratic principles in a variety of circumstances. Such a normative perspective could provide the foundation for a more normatively adequate conception of democracy and deal appropriately with majoritarian and minoritarian concerns.

Recent Christian Theological Ethics and Democracy

Our discussion of contrasting models of democracy has helped define the focus for our dialogue between Christian theological ethics and democratic theory. The

work of recent Christian theological ethicists writing on political democracy might help us forge a more normatively adequate conception of democracy, whether majoritarian, minoritarian or some synthesis of the two. Such a conception would need to be sophisticated and nuanced, and recognize that "the notions 'minority' and 'majority' are more complex than usage sometimes suggests."[97] Unfortunately, though democracy has been widely discussed in recent Christian theological ethics, the sophistication of its discussion of conceptions of democracy has been inadequate. Christian theological ethics has not often dealt with the contested issues in democratic theory regarding normatively appropriate ways to conceive of democracy. Even so, we might be able to use the theological-ethical premises and principles already present in Christian theological-ethical discussions of democracy to construct a more normatively adequate conception of democracy, which, in turn, might provide us better direction for Christian political action. Will searching out these resources help? That is the question which will occupy us.

To determine if we might utilize Christian theological-ethical resources in this way, we need to

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[97]Cunningham, 71. See also Charles E. Lindblom, Politics and Markets (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

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analyze a variety of positions taken in recent Christian theological ethics regarding political democracy. We shall inquire into the implicit conception of democracy found within each perspective, focusing on majoritarian-minoritarian issues, and the theological-ethical reasons offered as to why or why not democracy so conceived merits the support of Christians as a political-ethical expression of the Christian faith. We shall ask why each of the theological ethicists we analyze seems inclined to conceive of democracy in one way rather than in another. We shall attempt to identify some of the basic issues which lead each position toward its view of the relation between majoritarian and minority-protection concerns in its conception of democracy, e.g., views of justice, freedom, equality, rights, sin, the state, and, in particular, the common good. Do these moral principles provide the necessary resources for constructing a more normatively adequate conception of democracy?

We shall limit ourselves to explicit, theologically-based, Christian political-ethical discussions of democracy. We shall not attempt to search the entire range of recent Christian theology or theological ethics to see what the implications of other positions might be for constructing a normative conception of democracy. It seems prudent to limit ourselves in such a way, letting the theologians speak more for themselves and tracing the

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implications of what they say in directions they
themselves have already begun to tread.

Even with this limitation, the positions we will
examine represent a wide variety of contemporary perspec-
tives in Christian political ethics. We shall look at the
following perspectives: (1) the Radical Reformation
Christianity that is represented by John Howard Yoder;
(2) Christian Neoconservativism as represented by Michael
Novak; (3) Liberal Protestantism as represented by J.
Philip Wogaman; (4) Thomistic Natural Law Ethics as
represented by Jacques Maritain; (5) Process Theology as
represented by Douglas Sturm and (6) Christian Realism as
represented by Reinhold Niebuhr. Within each perspective
other ethicists with similar views might be consulted
insofar as this helps clarify the general position.

Liberation theology and fundamentalist theology are
notably absent from our list. The primary reason for the
exclusion of the former in the present work has been well-
stated by Arthur McGovern:

> one can justly argue... that liberation theologians
> have stressed far more the issue of socio-economic
> transformation and have not dwelled at any length on
> the importance of... political institutions and
> structures.[98]

In other words, liberation theologians have tended to
neglect explicit, systematic theological-ethical

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[98]Arthur McGovern, Liberation Theology and Its
Critics (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 185.

discussion of political democracy. One reason for such neglect might be the third-world context in which much liberation theology is done. One can understand if issues of hunger, poverty, and the distribution of economic resources seem more urgent, though issues about political democracy need not be alien to these concerns. While it would be a worthwhile project to try to identify the implications of various positions within liberation theology for political democracy, such a project falls outside our present one.

Fundamentalist political thought has also tended to focus on issues other than political democracy, e.g., prayer in schools or banning abortion. Furthermore, as Carl F.H. Henry has written, fundamentalism "tends still to be more aphoristic than academic" in its ethical thinking.[99]

Our present project seeks to ask tough questions of explicit, relatively systematic treatments of political democracy in recent Christian political ethics. It is to this theological literature we now turn.

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[99]Carl F.H. Henry, "Fundamentalist Ethics," in The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 242.

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CHAPTER II

JOHN HOWARD YODER:
THE POLITICS OF JESUS AND DEMOCRACY

John Howard Yoder's work in Christian theological ethics, which he identifies as a "radical Reformationist" ethic, cuts against the grain of the work of many other twentieth-century theological ethicists. As we examine his ethic and his discussion of political democracy, we will see how Yoder consciously emphasizes the differences between his positions and those of other Christian ethicists. He argues that much of the work done in "mainstream" Christian ethics suffers under a Constantinian paradigm which moves it away from its proper roots in the gospel texts about Jesus by inappropriatly accommodating non-Christian cultural resources. In contrast, Yoder develops a radical political ethic rooted in the Jesus story. He will argue that the gospel portrayal of Jesus provides a relevant model for Christian moral and political life. Yoder's position on political democracy is also very different from positions taken by most others in Christian theological ethics.

Our work in this chapter will be to examine Yoder's radical reformationist theological ethic, which provides

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the necessary foundation for understanding his discussion
and evaluation of political democracy. Beyond exploring
these explicit positions on democracy, we will endeavor to
reveal the conception of democracy operative in Yoder's
discussion. We will identify the place given to
majoritarian and minoritarian issues and ask how his
discussion might help in forging a more normatively
adequate conception of democracy?

Yoder's Radical Reformationist Ethic

Yoder identifies his Christian theological ethic as
a "radical reformationist ethic." Given his Mennonite
background, such a claim is not surprising. The Mennonite
movement, after all, traces its roots to the "Left-wing"
or "radical" stream of the sixteenth-century Protestant
Reformation. However, Yoder sees his perspective as a
paradigm more than as a historical or sociological label.[1]
He argues that this perspective "is closer to the gospel
and more properly to be recognized as the imperative under
which Christians stand than are the major alternatives."[2]
This perspective ought to be shared by those whose own
Christian tradition has roots outside the radical
Reformation. The work of Stanley Hauerwas, a Christian

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[1]John Howard Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom (Notre
Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 4.

[2]Ibid., 81.

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ethicist affiliated with the United Methodist Church, provides a good example of a radical reformationist position located outside those churches with roots in the left-wing of the Protestant Reformation.[3]

Yoder argues that the radical reformationist perspective is the proper paradigm, for doing Christian ethics. He also argues that this perspective is not "sectarian" in the sense identified by H. Richard Niebuhr, and others. In Christ and Culture, Niebuhr wrote that the Mennonites had come to represent "Protestant sectarianism" most purely because, among other reasons, they "renounce all participation in politics."[4] Yoder writes about his radical reformationist ethic in terms of "the Christian witness to the state" and "the politics of Jesus." He wants to construct a Christian political ethic that has relevance as a guide to action and reflection in the modern world, not a Christian sectarian ethic.

As noted, Yoder argues that the mainstream in Christian ethics suffers from a perspectival shift which he symbolically identifies with the Roman emperor

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[3]Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 216. Here Hauerwas writes that he has deep sympathies with Yoder's position. See also The Peaceable Kingdom (Notre Dame: Univeristy of Notre Dame Press, 1983) and After Christendom (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).

[4]H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1951), 56.

Constantine. The constantinian captivity of Christian ethics removes Jesus from the center of ethical reflection.[5] By contrast, the essence of the radical reformationist perspective is located in "the ultimate normative claim of the appeal to Jesus."[6]

Yoder's writings from The Christian Witness to the State through The Priestly Kingdom can be viewed as an ongoing attempt to put Jesus at the normative center of Christian ethics. Early in his book, The Christian Witness to the State, Yoder establishes the normative significance of "the example and teaching of Christ." In The Politics of Jesus, Yoder seeks to construct a convincing case that Jesus is "not only relevant but also normative for a contemporary Christian social ethic." He makes the same claim in The Priestly Kingdom.[7]

Yoder does not stand alone in making claims for the normative significance of Jesus. Others with very different ethical positions also claim that Jesus is the normative center of Christian ethics. The uniqueness of Yoder's perspective lies in his portrait of Jesus and the

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[5]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 82-83, 135, 136, 138.

[6]Ibid., 88.

[7]Yoder, The Christian Witness to the State (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1964), 7. Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 23. Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 8.

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the way in which he considers that portrait normative.[8]

Who is the Jesus who stands at the normative center of Yoder's ethic? A primary characteristic of Jesus is that "[he] was so faithful to the enemy-love of God that it cost him all his effectiveness."[9] One of the primary manifestations of Jesus' faithfulness to God was Jesus' nonviolence. Yoder describes Jesus' own ethic as an "ethic of revolutionary nonviolence."[10] With this ethic, Jesus brought into existence a new possibility for human social and political relationships.[11]

In living faithfully and nonviolently, Jesus gave up all claims to govern history. Yoder speaks of Jesus' "apparent abandonment of any obligation to be effective in making history move down the right track."[12] Jesus refused to be drawn into the power games of the establishment that determined what it meant to be politically effective, yet without losing political relevance. In spite of the renunciation of historical effectiveness,

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[8]For some alternative perspectives on Jesus as a norm in Christian ethics see, Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Scribner's, 1950) and James M. Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[9]Yoder, Politics, 239.

[10]Ibid., 230.

[11]Ibid., 62-63.

[12]Ibid., 242.

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God's dominion over the world makes decisive use of the apparent historical-political failings of Jesus.[13] In spite of its seeming ineffectiveness, the life of Jesus remains determinative for the meaning of history.

One final aspect of Yoder's portrait of Jesus needs examining. Jesus not only lived a faithful and nonviolent life, he also called into being a community. This was to be "a community of voluntary commitment, willing for the sake of its calling to take upon itself the hostility of the given society."[14] It was a community called to live a "Jesus kind of life."[15]

"Community" and "a Jesus kind of life" provide the two foci around which Yoder builds his Christian ethic. Jesus provides the moral norm for contemporary Christians, including the norm for their political-ethical lives.[16] Jesus provides the norm, but it is a norm for persons within a community which shares this norm of the Jesus kind of life.

The shape of Yoder's contemporary Christian ethic parallels his understanding of Jesus' own ethic of

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[13]Ibid., 242. See also 147ff for a discussion of Jesus' defeat of the powers and structures of the world which have enslaved human beings.

[14]Ibid., 45.

[15]Ibid., 94.

[16]Ibid., 15-23. Here Yoder discusses not only the normative status of Jesus but also assesses "mainstream" Christian ethics.

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revolutionary nonviolence. Christians are "those whose only goal is to be faithful to that love which puts one at the mercy of one's neighbor."[17] Faithfulness to love, and to Jesus who defines love, are the essential principles of this Christian ethic. Faithfulness, though, is a multi-faceted concept for Yoder.

Among the component principles of faithfulness, as Yoder understands it, are obedience, willingness to suffer, service, and integrity. Faithfulness entails "the obedience of God's people." Faithful obedience furthermore requires a willingness to suffer in one's obedience, because "suffering and not brute power determines the meaning of history."[18] Yoder does not intend to offer some sort of Christian masochistic ethic, where suffering for one's faithful obedience becomes an end in itself. Faithful obedience involves practicing the servanthood of Jesus, and finding ways to be "socially relevant with integrity." Persons committed to "Kingdom ethics" will give preference to servant roles over dominion roles as their way of being active in the wider society.[19]

One important theme in Yoder's Christian ethic which

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[17]Ibid., 243. Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 3.

[18]Yoder, Politics, 238.

[19]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 162.

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we have only touched upon is his treatment of "effective-ness." Yoder believes the concern of Christians to be effective in shaping the wider society is part of the Constantinian distortion of Christian ethics. Under a more appropriate vision of Christian ethics, "the key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience."[20]

> Perhaps this [recognition of the minority status of Christians] will prepare us to see how inappropriate and preposterous was the prevailing assumption, from the time of Constantine until yesterday, that the fundamental responsibility of the church for society is to manage it. And might it be, if we could be freed from the compulsiveness of the vision of ourselves as the guardians of history, that we could receive again the gift of being able to see ourselves as participants in the loving nature of God as revealed in Christ?[21]

This passage captures much of the meaning of Christian faithfulness in Yoder's ethic: freedom from an idolatrous compulsiveness, following the love of God as revealed in Jesus as the Christ, a willingness to serve, maintaining one's integrity even when this is not "effective." However, Yoder paradoxically asserts that, "in the long run, the right way is also the most effective."[22]

Faithfulness, with its concomitant sub-principles,

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[20]Yoder, _Politics_, 238.

[21]Ibid., 248.

[22]Yoder, _Witness_, 44.

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defines the basic contours of Yoder's ethic. One other
principle essential to Yoder's faithfulness ethic is the
principle of nonviolence for which the life of Jesus
provides the pattern. It is with the issue of nonviolence
that the theoretical rubber of this ethic meets the road
of everyday moral choices. The following statement may be
taken as a summary of Yoder's principle of nonviolence:
"The Christian has committed himself to have no recourse
to force, not only in his own interest, but even for the
sake of justice."[23] The importance of this principle to
Yoder's ethic of faithfulness can be seen in his
discussion of this ethic as an "ethic of revolutionary
nonviolence which Jesus offers to his disciples."[24] The
rejection of force and violence can lead to a responsible
refusal of power.[25] One obvious contrast this position
offers to many other positions in Christian ethics is its
rejection of just war thinking as finally appropriate for
Christians.[26] This coheres nicely with Yoder's rejection
of "effectiveness."

People called to live faithfully and nonviolently,
called to live the Jesus kind of life, form a community.

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[23]Ibid., 7.

[24]Yoder, _Politics_, 230.

[25]Ibid., 158.

[26]Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 75-76.

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"The church is herself a society... a political entity."[27]
Yoder understands the church to be "an alternative social
group" distinguished by the ethic which serves as its
standard.[28] This alternative political community
constitutes a minority within the world.[29]

Two aspects of Yoder's discussion of the church as a
moral-political community are particularly important for
understanding his ethic: its relation to moral
epistemology and its function as a social alternative.
The church provides the necessary community context for
practical moral reasoning. The corporate dimensions of
human nature are testified to by everyone's need for moral
counsel. "Moral obligation is learned by growing up in
historic communities."[30]

The Christian community, in addition to providing a
place where moral obligation and moral reasoning are
learned, provides an alternative model to the wider
society for the structuring of political relationships.
There are "lessons for the outside world from the inner
life of the Christian church as a society."[31] "The
alternative community discharges a modeling mission. The

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[27]Yoder, Witness, 17-18.

[28]Yoder, Politics, 111.

[29]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 158.

[30]Ibid., 38, 24.

[31]Yoder, Witness, 19.

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church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately."[32] The nonviolence of the church, and the creative ways it chooses to meet human needs consistent with that nonviolent stance, can teach the wider society. This is part of the Christian witness to the state.

Yoder's Theological-Political Ethic

We have seen how Yoder's radical reformationist ethic makes faithfulness to Jesus and his ethic of revolutionary nonviolence central for a contemporary Christian ethic. Yoder's Christian political ethic is an extension of his faithfulness ethic. In order to understand his treatment of political democracy, we need to see just how Yoder makes use of the concepts and principles of his basic ethical stance in his political ethic. We shall analyze Yoder's views of the state and government, of social sin, of justice and of the common good.

"The very nature of the state is force."[33] Here Yoder appropriates a long tradition in political thought. Max Weber argues that "a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[34]

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[32]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 92.

[33]Yoder, Witness, 7.

[34]Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

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As the reality of the state is grounded in the use
of force, "and the Christian has committed himself to have
no recourse to force," the state is fundamentally
nonchristian, according to Yoder.[35] "The function
exercised by government [its use of force] is not the
function to be exercised by Christians."[36] Christians are
called to do something other than exercise the dominion of
the governing state.[37]

Yoder, however, does not reject the notion that the
state can accomplish some important objectives in its use
force.

> The reign of Christ means for the state the obligation
> to serve God by encouraging the good and restraining
> evil, i.e., to serve peace, to preserve the social
> cohesion in which the leaven of the Gospel can build
> the church, and also render the old aeon more
> tolerable.[38]

The state serves an ordering function, or rather, God
orders the state in such a way that it serves God's
purposes. However, Yoder carefully argues that this fact
does not in any way change the Christian's obligation to
avoid using force. He argues that while God may use the
ordering power of the state, God does not declare the
force used in such ordering morally good, nor does God

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[35]Yoder, _Witness_, 7.

[36]Yoder, _Politics_, 199.

[37]Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 156.

[38]Yoder, _Witness_, 5.

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desire the participation of God's people in the use of force.[39]

For Yoder, the primary manifestations of sin in the social dimensions of human existence revolve around the use of force, which includes coercion and violence.

> There has been hierarchy and authority and power since human society existed. Its exercise has involved domination, disrespect for human dignity, and real or potential violence ever since sin has existed.[40]

While Yoder does not explicitly make a connection between his view of force as the primary expression of social sin and his criticisms of those who try to manage history, one can see an important connection between the two. Why do the governing powers of any state use force if not in an attempt to manage and control history? Efforts to manage history, whether by individuals or by groups, can be understood as attempts to usurp God's proper task. Yoder, then, might see the primary expression of social sin as a manifestation of the sin of idolatry.[41] These connections and interpretations seem implicit in Yoder's ethic. Our understanding of his thought is enhanced by making such connections explicit.

Justice, a norm often part of a Christian political ethic, also has a place within Yoder's political ethic.

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[39]Yoder, _Politics_, 203, 199.

[40]Ibid., 203.

[41]Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 195.

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Justice must be understood in relationship to love, for
that norm remains ultimate and primary. Yoder rejects any
standard independent of love, any standard "which can be
both known and attained apart from Christ."[42] However,
sin prevents the social order from attaining love.[43]

While Yoder refers to justice on a number of
occasions, he never defines this norm clearly. Justice
seems to highlight certain aspects of love. The Christian
church, under the norm of love, has within it "an
egalitarian thrust which casts light beyond the borders of
the church."

> It was the Christian community's experience of the
> equal dignity of every member of the congregation
> which ultimately, by the detour of secular post-
> Christian humanism to be sure, laid the groundwork for
> modern conceptions of the rights of man.[44]

If one aspect of what Yoder means by justice is
love's egalitarian thrust, another aspect has to do with
the ordering function of the state. Justice also incorp-
orates an aspect of "peace" in the social order as that
state of affairs when "the innocent are protected and the
guilty punished."[45] Still a third aspect of Yoder's

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[42]Yoder, Witness, 71.

[43]Ibid., 72.

[44]Ibid., 18.

[45]Ibid., 36.

understanding of justice is its link with the Christian

concern for the welfare of the neighbor.

> The state may either threaten or further the welfare
> of its subjects. The more sweeping the state's
> claims, and the more self-conscious its manipulation
> of social and economic mechanisms, the more self-
> evident does its effect on our neighbors' welfare
> become. Not only does this add a dimension to our
> understanding of what it is that drives a Christian to
> witness against injustice; this consideration further
> reminds us that "human welfare" is in itself a value,
> a criterion, which, although not always abstractly
> definable, is usually self-evident in a given context
> of need.[46]

Yoder's use of the term "injustice" here contrasts

it with "human welfare," so that human welfare seems to

provide a crucial aspect of Yoder's conception of justice.

In summary, we might say that Yoder understands justice to

be that sub-principle of love which focuses on the welfare

of the neighbor, on his or her dignity and on her or his

protection and, if need be, appropriate punishment.

Before leaving our discussion of the place of

justice in Yoder's Christian social ethic, we ought to

remind ourselves that the means open to the Christian in

the struggle for justice must be consistent with a non-

violent love ethic. Yoder speaks of running risks for the

sake of a higher justice and "of a commitment to live for

the service of others."[47]

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[46]Ibid., 14.

[47]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 194.

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Discovering Yoder's conception of justice requires some detective work. More such work is required to find out what he makes of the concept of the common good. On the face of it, Yoder seems to lack any conception of the common good as that concept is often used in Christian ethics.

> Since we cannot say that God has any "proper" pattern in mind to which unbelief should conform, the Christian witness to the state will not be guided by an imagined pattern of ideal society such as involved in traditional conceptions of the "just state," the "just war," or the "due process of law." An ideal or even "proper" society in a fallen world is by definition impossible.[48]

The "common good" is another concept often used to describe a pattern of an ideal society. This concept "is widely used to point to shared or public values and interests."[49] The term carries normative force. The common good, when defined substantively rather than merely formally, serves as a guide to those conditions which are thought to contribute to the good of each and all in any socio-political community.

Yoder, in criticizing the very idea of normative social ideals seems to reject any "common good" as

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[48]Yoder, Witness, 32.

[49]John Langan, "Common Good," in Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics, 102. The term "values" as used by Langan and Yoder refers to both moral and nonmoral values. See William Frankena, Ethics, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 62-63.

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Christianly normative. However, other passages indicate
that he does not completely neglect the possibility of a
common good normative for all. Yoder can speak of "the
authentic human interest and values of the whole society"
which are served by the church's faithfulness to its
calling to radical discipleship and the ethic contained
therein.[50] To speak of such shared values, and to speak
of them in a normative context, seems to imply some
nascent notion of the common good. We might say that, for
Yoder, the values represented and embodied within the
Christian community of faith are the authentic human
values, of importance to all persons whether they
recognize this or not. He claims that it is impossible
for the state to follow the moral principles of the
Christian community. Therefore, the state cannot achieve
the common good through its actions. Yoder thus dismisses
the common good as a standard of achievement for the
state, a function the concept tends to serve in the work
of many Christian ethicists.

The common good can never be achieved through the
actions of the state, and so can never truly be a moral
action guide for the state. The common good does,
however, seem to provide a foundation for the judgements
of the church witnessing to the state.

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[50]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 11.

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> The Christian witness will... always express itself in terms of specific criticisms, addressed to specific injustices in a particular time and place, and specific suggestions for improvements to remedy the identified abuse.... Our speaking to the state will call for the use of middle axioms. These concepts will translate into meaningful and concrete terms the general relevance of the lordship of Christ for a given social ethical issue.[51]

The state is judged by the common good as this concept is mediated through middle axioms. As Yoder understands the common good, it seems to function as an eschatological concept, fully attainable only when the kingdoms of this world become, fully, the kingdom of God under the lordship of Christ.

> The coming aeon is the redemptive reality which entered history in an ultimate way in Christ. The present age, by rejecting obedience, has rejected the only possible ground for man's well-being; the coming age is characterized by God's will being done.[52]

The common good is the ultimate destiny of the world.[53]

While the common good is primarily an eschatological concept, it also serves as a present standard for the church. Christian social and political ethics ought to focus on how the church lives out its faithfulness to God as understood in Jesus Christ. "The alternative community discharges a modeling mission. The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately."[54] This is

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[51]Yoder, _Witness_, 32.

[52]Ibid., 9.

[53]Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 92.   [54]Ibid., 92.

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the primary thrust of Yoder's socio-political ethic. As already noted, however, the church also exercises a witnessing ministry to the state, a modeling mission. It offers specific criticisms of specific injustices, making use of middle axioms. It provides proposals to the state which embody "less evil" rather than positive good in the Christian sense.[55] Yoder's political ethic provides the immediate context for his discussion of political democracy.

Yoder On Democracy

One could certainly anticipate, given the shape of Yoder's political ethic, that he is less than enamored with political democracy. His sweeping criticisms of the political state do not always distinguish between democratic polities and those of a more totalitarian stripe. Nevertheless, such a distinction has an importance in Yoder's thought.

In general, Yoder's offers a negative evaluation of political democracy as a form of governance for nation-states.[56] Of democratic societies Yoder writes, "even in such societies, some men wield the sword and others do

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[55] Yoder, Witness, 59.

[56] Yoder's most extensive treatments of political democracy are found in a section on that subject in Witness, 26-28, and in his essay "The Christian Case for Democracy" in Priestly Kingdom.

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not."[57] In discussing electoral processes usually
associated with democratic politics he writes, "the voter
chooses not a position of principle but the less
objectionable of two competing oligarchies."[58] Yoder
tends to collapse political democracy and oligarchy, i.e.,
the rule of the few.[59] Democracy does not represent a
strikingly new development in the way nation-states are
run. It still relies on coercion and elitism.[60] These
descriptive elements in Yoder's discussion of democracy
lead to his negative normative judgements about it. Yoder
conceives of existing democracies as minoritarian-elitist
democracies, and judges them negatively.

Nevertheless, Yoder's assessment of political
democracy is not entirely negative. His descriptions of
democracy as oligarchical, elitist and coercive seem to
reinforce his general position regarding the nature of the
state. Once he makes the point that political democracy,
as a way to govern a state, remains part of the unredeemed
reality of the world, Yoder seems free to offer a very
limited case case in favor of this form of polity.
Democracy provides more adequately for "vigilant

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[57]Yoder, _Witness_, 26.

[58]Ibid., 27.

[59]Ibid., 19. Also _Priestly Kingdom_, 158.

[60]Yoder, _Witness_, 26-27.

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supervision over the authority entrusted to a few" than other forms of governance.[61] In one particularly illuminating passage Yoder writes:

> Of all the forms of oligarchy, democracy is the least oppressive, since it provides the strongest language of justification and therefore of critique which the subjects may use to mitigate its oppressiveness.[62]

One could rephrase this argument by saying that Yoder views democracy as more rhetorically open to criticism than other forms of governance. Yoder argues that every governing group justifies its existence in terms of benefit to the people it rules. The justificatory language of democratic regimes allows greater latitude for any critique of those regimes, including a Christian witness to the democratic state.

That democracy allows for a more far-reaching supervision of those who rule than other forms of governance leads to another element in Yoder's case for democracy, namely that democracy gives a significant place to "minority leverage."[63] Small groups and voluntary associations are given more access to the powers that be under democracy. In this aspect of Yoder's case for democracy, we begin to see his preference for a conception of democracy which leans toward minoritarianism. To call

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[61]Ibid., 18-19.

[62]Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 158-159.

[63]Ibid., 167.

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this his normative conception of political democracy would

be misleading. No form of worldly governing can be

Christianly normative in Yoder's view. Yet the democracy

which represents a lesser evil seems to have a

minoritarian cast to it, not the elitist minoritarianism

which Yoder sees in actual democratic regimes, but a more

participatory, minority-protection conception of

democracy.

> The irreducible bulwark of social freedom is the
> dignity of dissent; the ability of the outsider, the
> other, the critic to speak and be heard. This is not
> majority rule; it is minority leverage.... Without it
> democracy becomes demagoguery or mindless majoritarian
> conformity.[64]

In his preference for democratic governance, as

compared with other forms of oligarchy, Yoder seems to

think that improvements can be made within democracies.

Such improvements might be characterized in terms of

achieving a greater degree of minority participation and

minority protection within elitist minoritarian democratic

systems. These achievements will be limited. They are

morally better because they represent a lesser evil rather

than a moral good. Still, Yoder seems to allow the

possibility of moral progress within democratic states as

when he speaks of calling for "an increasing degree of

democratization" and of finding "the realistic liberty to

foster and celebrate relative democratization

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[64]Ibid., 167.

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as one of the prophetic ministries of a servant people in a world we do not control."[65]

Is Yoder consistent in identifying a certain type of democracy as morally better? He would seem to need some sense of democracy as a normative concept to support this idea. Can some state of affairs be identified as morally better unless it contains some elements, incompletely embodied as they might be, of what is considered morally normative? Behind Yoder's assessment of the positive possibilities for the protection of minorities within political democracy lies a view of democracy as normative - but it is not a "political democracy." Yoder seems to be arguing that the state may not be the best home for democracy.

Yoder's normative vision of democracy is a vision of "the Christian cultic commonwealth," which is never a possibility for the political unit of a nation-state.[66] The normative democracy of the Christian commonwealth is unanimity democracy. Yoder, in one text, uses the term "dialogical democracy."[67] This amounts to unanimity decision-making. The most complete discussion of this notion is located in Yoder's essay on a Christian case

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[65]Yoder, _Witness_, 77. Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 166.

[66]Yoder, _Priestly Kingdom_, 166.

[67]Ibid., 92.

for democracy, but elements of it are foreshadowed in his earlier work. In The Christian Witness to the State, Yoder describes his norm for decisions within the Christian faith community. They should be, "the expression of a convinced consensus arrived at freely as the result of common study within the fellowship of believers."[68] The democracy within the Christian community embodies two crucial skills, critical listening and prophetic speaking.[69] Decisions emerge out of the dialogue of those who listen and speak with mutual respect. Yoder not only views such democracy as normative for present Christian communities, but also as the eschatological destiny of the world, i.e. "what the world is destined for in God's creative purpose."[70] Yoder's conception of democracy parallels A.D. Lindsay's "perfect democracy" where "men are guided solely by their inner voice and yet come to identical conclusions, where government has become consent and coercion has disappeared."[71]

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[68]Yoder, Witness, 19.

[69]Yoder, Priestly Kingdom, 166.

[70]Ibid., 70.

[71]A.D. Lindsay, Essentials of Democracy (Philadelphia: Univeristy of Pennsylvania Press, 1929), 16.

Assessing Yoder's Ethic of Political Democracy

As we plan to do with each of the Christian
political ethicists we will consider, we have covered a
great deal of ground in our discussion of the main
features of John Howard Yoder's ethic of political
democracy. We sought to ground his discussion of pol-
itical democracy in his basic theological ethical stance.
Making such connections in Yoder's case is particularly
important, because it enables us to see the high degree of
coherence within his work. Such coherence marks this as a
well-reasoned argument in favor of a particular Christian
political ethic. To write Yoder off as simply "sect-
arian," and thus as politically irrelevant, would be a
disservice to the careful work he has done in Christian
political ethics. An appreciation of the degree of
coherence in Yoder's reasoning does not amount to a simple
acceptance of his position, however. A number of
important issues need further examination in the process
of an adequate assessment.

Let us begin with the issue we are bringing to all
our Christian political ethicists, namely whether a
normatively adequate conception of political democracy has
more a majoritarian or a minoritarian cast, or whether it
ought to be able to relate important principles and
concerns in both conceptions of democracy in a broader
normative vision. Yoder's normative conception of

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democracy is of unanimity decision-making, the ultimate form of minority-protection democracy. This normative conception is not a vision for political democracy in the usual sense, however. This normative vision is an eschatological one, the ultimate destiny of the world in God's plan. Given Yoder's view of the church, this conception provides norms for its life. It does not, however, provide norms for political democracy in modern states except derivatively. Yoder argues that it is simply a fact that all existing political regimes make use of force in differing forms. Such use prevents the full achievement of democratic norms. Existing political democracies can be more democratic by being more open to minority opinions, by giving all groups in society voice and leverage. The legitimating rhetoric of democratic governments opens them to more criticism, giving each citizen more of the leverage Yoder sees as desirable. None of these achievements is morally good, however, only less morally evil. Yet this feature of democracies gives Yoder reason to endorse them in a backhanded manner. More democracy within democratic regimes is associated with some form of limited government, perhaps even approaching a strictly limited government.[72]

This further analysis of Yoder's position on political democracy helps us see that he does not really

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[72]Yoder, _Witness_, 40.

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provide any answer to the issue we are considering. Yoder does not offer any normative conception of political democracy, majoritarian or minoritarian, applicable to modern states. His political ethic is centered in the church as an alternative political space. It is the behavior of those within the community of faith, responding to the ethic of Jesus, that is more directly relevant to political life, not the ethic of Jesus itself. Christians ought to concern themselves with the actions of their own community instead of trying to manage the world. While such a position need not be sectarian in the sense of being indifferent to larger political realities, it seems at least separatist. A wedge is driven between church and world as one seeks to be faithful. Christian faithfulness provides the best evidence of God's action in the world, and God will use that faithfulness, in ways not fully comprehended, to bring about God's plan for the world. For Yoder, God's action in history seems focused within the church.

Yoder offers a sustained argument that his ethic is the one most appropriate to the Christian witness of faith. Given the enormous suffering caused by governing powers throughout the world's history, his position also has some credibility.[73] However, there are a number of

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[73]See Schubert M. Ogden, On Theology (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986) on the criteria of appropriateness and credibility.

issues which raise serious problems for Yoder's position.

The wedge driven between church and world in the
practical life of Christians can also be seen as a wedge
between faithfulness and effectiveness. "Effectiveness"
carries virtually no moral weight in Yoder's ethic. If
being politically and socially effective, e.g., in seeking
justice, involves the use of force or coercion, then one
ought not try to be effective.[74] One striking feature of
such a position is that it takes no account of potentially
vast differences in force used as against justice
achieved. Further, Yoder never offers an adequate an-
alysis of the concept of power and the concomitant
concepts of coercion, force, violence. Does the threat of
fines or incarceration constitute morally unjustifiable
coercion? Many achievements of justice within the laws of
any state carry with them the threat of punishment if such
laws are violated. The implied threat of punishment seems
a small price to pay for the achievements of justice
represented in, e.g., civil rights laws. Should we simply
view these as less evil rather than as a positive
achievement of some moral good?

These issues go right to the heart of Yoder's
theological ethic, raising questions about the conception
of God within it. Does God act primarily in the

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[74]Yoder, _Politics_, 243-244.

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faithfulness of one Jesus of Nazareth, and then, subsequently, through the actions of those who follow Jesus? Furthermore, is Yoder's interpretation of love, rooted in his understanding of Jesus, an adequate interpretation? Stephen Post, in A Theory of Agape argues that Yoder's position is skewed by its overemphasis on the cross.[75] Is God's concern finally some end result to history, some future state of affairs linked only to the Christian witness of faith, and the community engendered by it, and not to any other historical achievements? Other conceptions of God, which seek to be appropriate expressions of the Christian witness of faith, seem more credibile in terms of human experiences of the significance of historical achievements of justice, and of the anguish of injustice. The God who loved the world so much is the same God who requires justice (John 3:16 and Micah 6:8). Other theologies also offer more credible views of the continuing reality of sin within both church and world, and of God's work in overcoming sin in both church and world. In an ultimate sense, any use of coercion might be viewed as morally suspect. In a world where sin remains pervasive, the use of coercion to limit the damaging consequences of human sin may be morally justifiable. While Yoder views sin as a pervasive

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[75]Stephen G. Post, A Theory of Agape (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 46-51.

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reality in the world, does he adequately appropriate the Christian tradition on sin and its enormous destructive potential?

To raise issues which strike at the adequacy of Yoder's theological ethic, in terms of both credibility and appropriateness, differs from offering a positive case for an alternative position. Some of the other ethicists we will consider provide us alternative theologies and theological ethics. For now it suffices to say that if one can make a case, based on a differing theology, for some notion of Christian effectiveness in the political and social life of modern nation-states, then the whole issue of morally justifiable coercion needs to be reconsidered, and with it the possibility of a morally normative conception of democracy not based on unanimity. If a Christian case for historical-political effectiveness can be made, the issues of who decides what a state will do, and of the processes of decision-making, in a normative conception of democracy become relevant again.

If we finally reject Yoder's position, we need not ignore its potential contributions to our discussion about a normative conception of democracy and the place of majoritarian and minoritarian concerns within it. Even within a Christian political ethic concerned with being effective within history, many of the issues Yoder raises are pertinent. He reminds us that we ought not equate

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political democracy with the Kingdom of God. Political democracy operates in a world marred by sin, where human beings often seek their own good, disregarding the cost to others. Political democracy, if viewed as morally good, is most appropriately seen as one possibility for relative moral good within history where sin remains a reality.

Yoder's discussion of democracy emphasizes the importance of the voices of minority communities and the importance of political dialogue. To take Yoder seriously requires that we keep such concerns alive in any normative conception of democracy. Further, his position argues for the importance of keeping democratic rhetoric alive. Political democracies which ignore the importance of the language of democracy might be in danger of losing their very identity as democracies. We might go on to ask, in a way Yoder does not, about the potential role of churches, as communities and institutions within history, in keeping democratic dialogue and rhetoric alive.

Finally, within Yoder's eschatological vision of democracy, one finds a link between the concepts of democracy and the common good, though the latter plays a very minor role in his thinking. As we study our other ethicists, we might continue to look for a relationship between democracy and the common good and the potential implications of this relationship for the issue of majoritarian and minoritarian democracy.

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Yoder's theological ethic, and its consideration of political democracy, provides a distinct position within Christian political ethics. It must be viewed as a fundamental alternative to all the other positions we will discuss.[76] To accept it would be to relegate the whole issue of varying conceptions of democracy to a place of relative unimportance. If we look elsewhere for our basic theological-ethical stance, we might still incorporate many of Yoder's insights into a normative conception of democracy.

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[76]James M. Gustafson, Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 74-76.

CHAPTER III

MICHAEL NOVAK'S ETHIC
FOR DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM

In striking contrast to John Howard Yoder's sharp
criticism of modern Christian ethical thought for its easy
accommodation to "Constantinian" categories, Michael Novak
appeared to ride the conservative political tides of the
1980's as a leading "neo-conservative" thinker. Novak
identifies his position by a variety of labels:
"neoconservative," classical liberal or Whig.[1] Others
associated with this tendancy in Christian political-
ethical thought are Richard John Neuhaus and Robert Benne.
Novak's The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism was published
during Ronald Reagan's first term as U.S. president, about
the same time that he was chief of the U.S. delegation to
the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

J. Philip Wogaman helps identify the contours of
neoconservative Christian political thought. He
identifies a number of prominent themes which tend to

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[1]Michael Novak, The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism
(New York: Touchstone Books, 1982), 315. Novak, Free
Persons and the Common Good (Lanham, MD: Madison Books,
1989), 2-3.

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define this perspective: 1) a strong affirmation of political democracy; 2) market capitalism as a necessary companion to political democracy; and 3) the legitimation of American power.[2] These themes can be found throughout Novak's work. We will focus on Novak's understanding of, and justification for political democracy.

One observation to be made at the outset is that neoconservative theological-political ethics is not primarily defined in terms of its theological positions. "Neoconservative" tends to define a range of political, rather than more strictly theological, views. Medcalf and Dolbeare, in Neopolitics: American Political Ideas in the 1980s include Novak's thinking in their discussion of neoconservativism.[3] While Novak's political ideas fall within neoconservativism, his theology tends to be broadly liberal. When he discusses his journey to "neoconservativism," it is a discussion about changes in his political-ethical thinking rather than about changes in his theology per se, though such shifts might represent theological changes as well.[4]

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[2]J. Philip Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), Chap. 5.

[3]Linda J. Medcalf and Kenneth M. Dolbeare, Neopolitics: American Political Ideas in the 1980s (New York: Random House, 1985).

[4]Novak, Spirit, 315. Novak, Free Persons, 2-3.

The theological aspects of Novak's thought are much less developed than those of the other theological ethicists considered in this work. Additionally, the connections between theology and political ethics are not as tight in his work as in the work of others. Nevertheless, our focus is precisely on political ethics and the resources within Christian theological-political ethics for developing a normatively adequate conception of political democracy. Novak's chief concerns are for political thought and its theological grounding, for developing a normative model of democracy, and for spelling out the type of economic system compatible with normative democracy.

Our discussion of Novak's work will begin with his basic theological-ethical stance. We then examine his political ethic and, within that ethic, identify the main features of his view of democracy, paying particular attention to its majoritarian and minoritarian characteristics. We shall also discuss the case Novak constructs for why democracy so conceived merits theological-ethical support. Finally, we shall offer some assessment of his position.

Novak's Basic Theological-Ethical Stance

Whereas Yoder's basic concern was to articulate a Christian theological ethic, Novak's is to articulate a political ethic. Nevertheless, Novak brings broader

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theological-ethical themes into his discussion of politics and society. He defines theology as, "sustained reflection upon God and his dealings with the human race."[5] The major task of Novak's _The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism_ is an investigation of the theological underpinnings of democratic capitalism. His most concentrated theological work as a neoconservative thinker is found in the twentieth chapter of that book. Novak is equally concerned to reveal connections between the theology or spirit of democratic capitalism and Christian theology.

In chapter twenty of _The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism_, "A Theology of Democratic Capitalism," Novak discusses "some of the important doctrines of Christianity... which helped supply the ideas through which democratic capitalism has emerged in history."[6] Besides asserting a socio-historical link between ideas and a political-economic system, Novak is establishing the basis for a normative argument. The theological themes introduced there, along with others found elsewhere in his work, provide an outline of Novak's own theology. The following ideas are discussed in this crucial chapter: the Trinity, the Incarnation, competition, sin, separation

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[5]Novak, _Spirit_, 18.

[6]Ibid., 334.

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of realms, and caritas, and each suggests important political-ethical ideas.

The Trinity represents the ideas of pluralism-in-unity and community. "What is most valued among humans is that community within which individuality is not lost."[7] The incarnation teaches us to face reality and think in concrete terms.[8] The doctrine of original sin provides support for the balance of power sought in democratic capitalism. The primary aim of a democratic capitalist system is to work against tyranny, "to fragment and to check power, but not to repress sin."[9] In other words, this political-economic system fights tyranny by keeping sin in persons and groups from gaining too much power. Novak's discussion of the separation of realms is derived from his discussion of sin. "At the heart of democratic capitalism is a differentiation of systems designed to squeeze some good from sinful tendencies."[10] Caritas, i.e., compassion and sacrificial love, provides an ideal of both individual autonomy and of community.[11] Novak, in two striking statements, connects love and economics. "The loved one is other - an autonomous person." "In order to create wealth, individuals must be free to be

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[7]Ibid., 338.

[8]Ibid., 340.   [9]Ibid., 350.

[10]Ibid., 353.   [11]Ibid., 358.

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other."[12] Love of other and the idea and ideal of liberty are linked. For Novak, freedom or liberty is a good to be cherished and achieved, and achieving it provides a primary moral norm in his ethic.

Many would regard these doctrines as important to the Christian faith, and Novak's attempt to connect them to democratic capitalism begins to form the basis for a normative theological-ethical case for political democracy. The other idea discussed in this chapter, "competition," does not usually generate as much theological discussion. Novak argues that

> it does not seem to be inconsistent with the gospels for each human being to struggle, under the spur of competition with his fellows, to become all he can become.... [Further] it seems wrong to imagine that the spirit of competition is foreign to the gospels, and that, in particular, competition for money is humankind's most mortal spiritual danger.[13]

This understanding of "competition," and the prominent place given it, is unique in theological ethics. Is Novak arguing that most forms of competition are good, or that they have positive consequences? Does he distinguish different types of competition? What is the relation between competition and conflict? Is competition necessary for human persons to struggle to become all they might become? Such questions are not adequately addressed.

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[12]Ibid., 353, 355.

[13]Ibid., 348-349.

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While these six theological ideas occupy prominent places within Novak's own theological ethic, his views of God and the human, generated out of these ideas, are particularly important.

> The image of God underlying socialist thought is Nous: the all-seeing, commanding intelligence. The image of God underlying the free market and the triune system of democratic capitalism is Phronimous, the practical provident intelligence embodied in singular agents in singular concrete situations.[14]

This passage not only describes the spirit or theology of democratic capitalism. Novak's own view of God is much closer to God as Phronimous. In identifying the spirit or theology of democratic capitalism, Novak presents much of his own theological-ethical position.

God is embodied in concrete situations, and God's creation remains unfinished.[15] Human beings have future work to do in completing God's creative activity. Additional possibilities exist for God's embodiment in concrete situations. Novak speaks of the "lowliness" of God. He argues that, on the one hand, we ought not expect too much from human beings. On the other hand, we ought to expect that God is made concrete in humble human possibilities.[16] Another important feature of Novak's discussion of God is his assertion that God "is the

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[14]Ibid., 112.

[15]Ibid., 73.

[16]Novak, Free Persons, 73-74.

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universal common good." The ultimate purpose for each person is "to be one with God in an everlasting communion of insight and choice."[17]

Novak gives more attention to a theology of the human person and her or his socio-political life than to his view of God. Human persons are beings in the image of God.[18] The most striking features of this image of God are the human capacities for insight and choice, the latter also defined as the human capacity for love.[19] As already noted, Novak views human persons as ordered to union with God and community.[20] The image of God provides one basis for Novak's view that persons have dignity, an equal dignity before God and others.[21] Another foundation for the dignity of persons is the "unalienable respons-ibility of each person" as well as their "final destination... in the full insight and love of communion with God."[22]

If the idea of human persons as reflecting the image of God forms one pole of Novak's theology of the human,

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[17]Ibid., 30.

[18]Ibid., 137.

[19]Ibid., 137-138. Novak, _Spirit_, 64.

[20]Novak, _Free Persons_, 30-31.

[21]Novak, _Spirit_, 84.

[22]Novak, _Free Persons_, 31.

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the notion of sin forms the other. For Novak, the spirit of democratic capitalism views sin as "rooted in the free personality... an ineradicable given from which all realistic thinking about political economy must begin."[23] Sin is a universal feature of human experience. Beyond this affirmation, Novak's discussion of sin can be confusing. Sin is viewed in terms of self-interest, yet not all forms of self-interest are considered sinful. Novak argues that the self in "self-interest" is a complex entity. Furthermore, the concept of self-interest admits of a range of expressions.[24] Should sin be considered inordinate pursuit of self-interest or pursuit of narrow self-interest? This position is made even less clear in Novak's argument that self-interest and the energy of sin and can be put to creative use via unintended consequences.[25] Nevertheless, self-interest is not a sufficient "moral attitude" for social life as not all of its consequences are good. We need other moral and religious attitudes.[26] Novak, however, goes on to argue that it is precisely the political-economy of democratic capitalism which harnesses the energy of self-interest and sin to creative purposes by trying to account for unintended consequences.

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[23]Novak, Spirit, 82.

[24]Ibid., 80, 93, 94.

[25]Ibid., 80, 82.   [26]Ibid., 80-82.

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Two other themes in Novak's theological ethic need to be discussed for a better understanding of his more specific political ethic. Novak argues that democratic capitalism, though often accused of promoting radical individualism, in fact promotes community, "the community of free persons in voluntary association."[27] The hidden ideal of democratic capitalism is "the communitarian individual."[28] Novak understands the importance of community in theological ethics and wants to show how his ethic understands and promotes it.[29] One recognizes this continuing attempt to defend democratic capitalism by delineating its views of important theological ethical themes such as community in Novak's more recent work, Free Persons and the Common Good. The important question is not whether Novak has a view of community, but whether or not it is an adequate one.

The other theological ethical concept we need to introduce at this juncture is the principle of subsidiarity. "According to this principle, human life proceeds most intelligently and creatively when decisions are made at the level closest to concrete reality."[30]

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[27]Ibid., 129.   [28]Ibid., 144.

[29]See Frank G. Kirkpatrick, Community: A Trinity of Models (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1986) on the importance of the idea of "community."

[30]Novak, Spirit, 179.

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While Novak's views of community and subsidiarity raise questions which need to be addressed, they provide a good transition into his more specific political-ethical thought.

Novak's Political-Ethical Thought

Besides the aforementioned concepts of community and subsidiarity, Novak's more specifically political-ethical thought can be characterized by its focus on the concept of "the common good." Community and subsidiarity provide two of the ideas around which a conception of the common good is constructed. Before proceeding with our discussion of the common good let us look at the way Novak includes within it two other common elements in political-ethical thought, "the state" and "justice." Novak provides no view of the state independent of his consider-ations of the common good and democracy. He also subsumes justice or social justice within his understanding of the common good. He offers little in the way of an explicit treatment of justice beyond suggesting that it is one aspect of the common good.[31] Novak, does, however, argue that the concept of social justice needs to be defined, in part, in terms of concrete institutions.[32] It is the

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[31]Novak, _Free Persons_, 88-89.

[32]Novak, _Freedom With Justice_ (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 35.

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common good that remains central to Novak's theologically grounded political ethic.

As already noted, the common good, conceived from an ultimate perspective, is communion with God. Novak uses the familiar biblical-theological notion of the Kingdom of God to describe this view of the common good.

> The universal common good consists in the highest possible development of human capacities for insight and choice, in union with the Creator who "draws all things to Himself." This last sense, clearly, is eschatological. The common good, the full "Kingdom of God," never arrives within history; it is the "impossible possibility" which nonetheless serves as the ultimate judgement upon the poor approximations to it that humans actually achieve within history.[33]

At this level there is a complete coincidence of the personal and communal good.[34] Novak's reference to "communal good" can be misleading. He invokes it when he discusses the good of all the individuals within a community. Where, however, is the good of the community which might be considered apart from a simple aggregate of individual goods? Where is Novak's account of social relations? These questions arise again and again as we consider his ethic.

The common good, as the Kingdom of God, serves as the criterion of Christian judgement of historical socio-political achievement.[35] Here Novak shares a great deal

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[33]Novak, <u>Free Persons</u>, 186-187.

[34]Ibid., 32.   [35]Novak, <u>Spirit</u>, 21.

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with Yoder. In contrast to Yoder, Novak supplements this eschatological notion of the common good as the Kingdom of God, with a more immediately and politically relevant conception of the common good. For consistency and coherence we shall use the term "common good" in this more temporal sense and reserve the term "Kingdom of God" for discussing the eschatological or transcendent meaning of the common good. "On earth and in time, the common good of persons is to live in as close an approximation of unity in insight and love as sinful human beings might attain."[36] Novak distinguishes this formal definition of the common good from material conceptions of the common good which add specificity and temporal contextuality to the more formal definition.[37] Even the more relevant formal and material conceptions of the common good remain a "benchmark" from which any achievements of the common good within political-economic systems are to be judged. In other words, "no level of the common good as achievement has yet met the full measure of legitimate expectation."[38]

Besides distinguishing between the common good in formal and material senses, and asserting that even at

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[36]Novak, _Free Persons_, 34.

[37]Ibid., 177.

[38]Ibid., 113.

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this dimension of human existence the common good represents both achievement and benchmark, Novak discusses other important aspects of the common good. He asserts that the common good is often difficult to define. It finally transcends any one conception of it.[39]

In the midst of these abstract qualifications, Novak presents an extended discussion of material aspects of the common good which provides more specificity to his abstract conceptualizations. The major defining characteristic of his conception of the common good is individual liberty.

> A major part of the common good in free republics is to allow citizens to exercise their own liberties. Public decisions must allow as large a scope to individual liberty as possible.... To seek the general welfare means, above all, to preserve the blessings of liberty, than which there is no greater welfare.[40]

Novak goes on to assert that the practical intelligence of free individuals leads them to choose cooperation. This return to the theme of cooperation is part of his argument that democratic capitalism need not be radically individualistic.

A number of other important concepts seem involved in Novak's understanding of liberty as the main constituent of the common good, among them: an

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[39]Ibid., 31. Novak, Spirit, 54.

[40]Novak, Free Persons, 77.

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interpretation of individual rights, a somewhat "positive" view of inequality, and free market economies. He argues that "the protection of individual rights" is central to the conception of the common good.[41] The rights which Novak seems to have in mind are "private" rights - rights as protection from the state and rights against interference.[42] Such a conception of rights has been criticized by a number of social ethicists who argue that any hard and fast distinctions between rights of noninterference and rights requiring positive action is untenable.[43] For instance, protecting the rights of people to free expression or to vote requires that a system of protection be established.

With the prominence of liberty in Novak's conception of the common good, it is not surprising that he argues, "that natural and developed inequalities serve the common good." Furthermore, a free market best serves the common good as it frees individuals to engage creatively in economic activity.[44]

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[41]Ibid., 41.

[42]Ibid., 155, 42.

[43]Henry Shue, <u>Basic Rights</u> (Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 1980). Carol C. Gould, <u>Rethinking Democracy</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[44]Novak, <u>Spirit</u>, 204. Novak, <u>Free Persons</u>, 7.

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The common good, as Novak understands it, ought not
to be defined by ideas alone, but also by institutions.[45]
Individual liberty provides the fundamental foundation for
the common good. Such liberty entails the protection of
certain individual rights and free markets, even when
these lead to inequalities. The institutions needed for
the common good are characterized by their service to
individual development.

> Citizenship requires attention to the common
> institutions that secure personal liberties and help
> them to flower. In another sense, common institutions
> are ordered to the full development of free persons.[46]

Such institutions, however, should also promote the
cooperation of free persons, in part by establishing
general rules and laws designed to bring to all the
benefits of such cooperation.[47]

Earlier we noted that Novak does not develop a
conception of social justice apart from his conception of
the common good. Another concept, often considered
important in a Christian political ethic, is "order."
Order, as Novak understands it, is also part of the common
good, and is defined by the interaction of his conceptions
of liberty and the institutional requirements of the
common good. Social order appropriate to free persons

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[45]Novak, Free Persons, 34-35, 170.

[46]Ibid., 12.

[47]Ibid., 82.

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arises out of individual initiatives within a framework of appropriate institutions. Free markets are an example of the way in which persons acting intelligently for their own interests, broadly conceived, can produce order consistent with the common good.[48]

Novak's view of the material common good includes institutions designed to promote other aspects of the common good, particularly individual liberty. In conjunction with this, Novak asserts that, "the task of achieving the common good is in large part a political task, since the designing of an appropriate institutional framework is a sine qua non."[49] The politics of the common good, i.e., the political process which is both part of, and productive of aspects of the common good, can be characterized, in part by critical communication which respects the views of others.[50]

While achieving the common good remains the primary task of a politics of critical communication, other aspects of society are vitally involved in creating the common good. "The common good must be achieved not solely by the state but by a vast range of social bodies beyond the reach of the state."[51] These other social

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[48]Ibid., 91-100.

[49]Ibid., 121. Novak, Spirit, 58.

[50]Novak, Free Persons, 169.

[51]Ibid., 44.

institutions play the primary role in achieving the common good. While Novak asserts that politics ought to be concerned with the common good, and that a politics so concerned ought to be characterized by respectful communication, his description of politics as it exists is strikingly different from this ideal. "Imperfections and vices weigh down political life, because politics is inevitably about favors, preferments, and awards influenced by power."[52] While some distance between one's descriptive and normative views of a sphere of action can be contained within a political theory, one wonders whether or not the chasm created here can be bridged.

One final aspect of Novak's conception of the common good needs comment. "The test of any good society (and any purported common good) is how well it takes care of its most vulnerable members."[53] However, Novak quickly qualifies this test. He wonders whether concern for the poor ought to be the first priority in a society seeking the common good. The common good serves as the primary moral concept and standard in Novak's political ethic. This sub-principle of concern for the vulnerable might form part of his material definition of this vital concept, though its importance is not clear.

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[52]Ibid., 132.

[53]Ibid., 154.

Democracy in Novak's Political Ethic

The common good, as the primary normative concept in Novak's political ethic, turns out to be a cluster concept, thus other concepts also provide important norms, including the concept of democracy.[54] While Novak's discussion of democracy contains both descriptive and normative material, developing a normative conception of democracy seems his primary concern. He joins with a host of democratic theorists in thinking that when a putative democracy moves too far away from normative democracy, then the former ought not to be considered a democracy at all.

The foundation of Novak's normative conception of democracy is the link he forges between democracy and the common good. He argues that the Federalist Papers, in which James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay argued for the merits of the United States Constitution defining U.S democracy, were "an attempt to sketch a new way for an entire public to realize the common good."[55] In terms we have already used to define Novak's conception of the common good, we can say that a democratic government appears to be one of the institutions necessary to the

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[54]Connolly, Terms of Political Discourse, defines a cluster concept as an internally complex concept the understanding of which requires understanding other concepts which are also complex.

[55]Novak, Free Persons, 43.

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common good. What is most significant in terms of our inquiry is the way Novak conceives of democracy consistent with the common good.

From our previous discussion of the importance of individual liberty to Novak's conception of the common good, we can assume that he will conceive of normative democracy as a limited state. In reference to the authors of the U.S. Constitution, Novak writes of their view of the necessity of "limited government."[56] That phrase, by itself, provides only a clue to his position, but it is a clue we can trace with profit. In another passage, Novak writes about "the severe limits that ought to be placed upon the power of the state."[57] The phrase, "severe limits," suggests some affinity with Nozick's views on a minimal state. Here we see emerging a conception of democracy that is fundamentally oriented toward the protection of certain individual rights. In other words, Novak leans toward a minoritarian conception of democracy. While most theological ethicists would agree that a limited state of some sort is essential for a normatively adequate conception of democracy, not all favor a strictly limited state.

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[56]Ibid., 44, 132. Novak, _Spirit_, 203, 246.

[57]Novak, _Free Persons_, 31.

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Other aspects of Novak's discussion of his normative conception of democracy also indicate leanings toward minoritarian democracy. He argues that the founders of the United States, who often seem to speak for him, sought "remedies against the maladies inherent in the democratic idea itself," among which he includes the Constitutional notion of checks and balances to help keep government limited.[58] The institutions necessary to representative government were "designed to limit majoritarian decision-making."[59]

The cumulative impact of such statements seems to indicate that Novak's normative conception of democracy leans in the direction of minoritarian democracy. However, within this normative conception elements of majoritarian models of democracy are included. Again appealing to the founders of U.S. Constitutional government Novak writes, "even while retaining the principle of majority rule, they contrived to find ways to protect limited government."[60] Novak cedes some territory to the notion that government decisions need to be made

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[58]Novak, "The Philosophical Meaning of American Civilization in World History," in Freedom in the Modern World, ed. Michael D. Torre (Notre Dame: American Maritain Association, 1989), 205, 213.

[59]Novak, Spirit, 175.

[60]Novak, "Philosophical Meaning," 213.

for the common good, thus the need for some decision-rule. He also seems to think that "democracy" gives majorities some priority in decision-making. Novak is quick to point out that the type of majorities most inclined to promote the common good are shifting majorities, i.e., majorities formed by coalescing factions.[61] The process whereby majorities come together can be slow and laborious, thus helping to avoid the formation of majorities which are easily swayed by demagoguery, sudden passion, and intolerant inclinations.[62]

Thus, while giving some place for the concerns of majoritarian democrats in his normative conception of democracy, vague and indefinite though it is, Novak seems most drawn to minoritarian notions. His references to majorities almost always strike notes of suspicion. Majorities rightly formed may arrive at some decisions that approximate the common good, yet we must always be vigilant in our efforts to avoid the tyranny of the majority. Novak ties this potential for majority tyranny to his theological understanding of human sinfulness.[63]

Novak's doctrine of human sinfulness not only undergirds his normative conception of democracy as

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[61]Novak, Free Persons, 52-53. Novak, Spirit, 58.

[62]Novak, Spirit, 175. Novak, "Philosophical Meaning," 213.

[63]Novak, Free Persons, 146. Novak, "Philosophical Meaning," 216.

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implying a more strictly limited government; it also undergirds his concern for the protection of certain individual rights. A normative conception of democracy includes the concept of a strictly limited state because such a government is more respectful of certain individual human rights.[64] Again we might emphasize the importance of individual liberty and individual rights to Novak's conception of the common good.[65]

Another feature of Novak's normative conception of democracy, which reinforces our judgement of its minoritarian character, is his general assessment of the place of political participation in democracy. In a discussion of a democratic socialist conception of participatory democracy Novak writes, "most persons have as little to do with politics as they can."[66] If one of the characteristic emphases of majoritarian democracy is political participation, Novak's rather negative view of it, or at least of certain conceptions of it, gives further evidence of a normative conception of democracy more in the minoritarian camp. Novak seems to say, that when democracy gets too bogged down in "politics," or when it

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[64]Novak, _Spirit_, 14, 208.

[65]Novak, _Free Persons_, 41.

[66]Novak, _Spirit_, 209.

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attempts to overreach its limits, then it moves away from what it ought to be.

Finally, we ought to discuss the close relationship Novak sees between political democracy and a capitalist, free market economy. Novak argues that to understand the full democratic capitalist social system, one must see it as composed of three sub-systems: a democratic polity, a predominantly market economy and a pluralist-liberal moral-cultural system.[67] These three systems are intended to work together. "Political democracy is compatible in practice only with a market economy."[68] The kind of market economy Novak has in mind is a free enterprise system in which the government plays a relatively nonrestrictive role. He wants to "call attention to the underlying consonance of political and economic liberties, and to note... their common source in liberties of conscience, morals, and culture."[69]

Whereas Novak's view of the concrete practice of politics carries negative overtones, his view of the workings of free market economies is overwhelmingly positive. The rich in societies with such economies are

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[67]Ibid., 14. Novak, _Free Persons_, 37.

[68]Novak, _Spirit_, 14.

[69]Ibid., 362.

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useful to those societies. Under market economies, concentrations of power tend to dissolve over time. Markets embody certain virtues, particularly virtues centered in human cooperation and prudence.[70]

Novak's discussion of market economies further reinforces his predominantly minoritarian conception of democracy. The protection of free economic activity, by setting limits to government activity in the economic sphere, promotes the common good in Novak's estimation. Yet some majoritarian notions make their way into Novak's normative democracy even here. He asserts that the democratic political system "has many legitimate roles to play in economic life."[71] However, Novak never elaborates on this idea and his other statements indicate that such legitimate roles would be strictly limited.

In seeking to explicate Novak's normative under-standing of democracy we have already begun to see some of the ways he argues that such democracy deserves the support of Christian persons. The very idea of a normative conception implies obligational commitments. Still, it is worth our effort to explore more system-atically the reasons Novak gives for why democracy so conceived merits the support of Christian persons. Such

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[70]Ibid., 213, 204. Novak, Free Persons, 67, 96.

[71]Novak, Spirit, 57. Novak, Free Persons, 115.

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support would involve attempts to establish democratic capitalist societies where they do not yet exist, and attempts to reform existing democratic capitalist systems in the direction of the normative conception offered.

First of all, Novak asserts that "Judaism and Christianity do not require democratic capitalism."[72] After all, the common good, from an ultimate perspective, transcends history. Even so, the common good, understood as a benchmark for historical societies, does admit of greater or lesser degrees of achievement. Compared to democratic capitalism, "all other known systems of political economy are worse."[73]

While Judeo-Christian religious adherents, then, cannot claim any ultimate sanction for democratic capitalism, neither can they ignore the achievements of this political-economic system. If one moral aspect of these religious commitments is to promote the common good in its historically relevant aspects, then the positive results achieved by democratic capitalism must be acknowledged. Novak's case for democracy and capitalism is grounded here in the results it achieves, including those achieved through unintended consequences.[74]

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[72]Novak, Spirit, 336.

[73]Ibid., 28.

[74]Ibid., 89, 147.

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Of all the systems of political economy which have shaped our history, none has so revolutionized ordinary expectations of human life - lengthened the life span, made the elimination of poverty and famine thinkable, enlarged the range of human choice - as democratic capitalism.[75]

Besides this pragmatic or consequentialist case for democratic capitalism, Novak offers a more principled case. One of the primary features of Novak's work from The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism to Free Persons and the Common Good is to excavate and explicate the spirit of democratic capitalism, i.e., to search out its theological and spiritual roots.[76] As part of this task, Novak argues that "democratic capitalism presupposes and nourishes certain values, perceptions and virtues."[77] These values, virtues and perceptions, along with the practices of democratic capitalism are more consistent with the aims of Judaism and Christianity than the values, virtues and practices of other systems.[78]

The consonance of democratic capitalism with Judeo-Christian theological morality is spelled out in a number of ways. Democracy comprises an important part of a

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[75]Ibid., 13. See also Novak, Free Persons, 8.

[76]Robert Benne, The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981). Benne shares Novak's task, p. 11.

[77]Novak, Spirit, 156.

[78]Ibid., 242.

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system which Novak describes as a formal common good. The democratic system, its order, procedures, and rules, is a formal common good through which persons hope to achieve the common good materially.[79] In short, democracy can be considered a common good system.

In light of his doctrine of God as the ultimate common good, "all powers of state and society are radically limited."[80] This provides another aspect of Novak's common good argument for the moral desirability of democracy. He also argues that God's creation is intended to be an arena of liberty.[81]

The principled theological case for political democracy extends to linking it with a theologically-grounded respect for certain individual rights and conscience. "There is an inner consonance between the inherent... respect for free acts of faith and conscience common to Judaism and Christianity, and the rights protected by democracy."[82] One aspect of this recognition of the importance of individual conscience is the assertion that individuals are in the best position to judge their own interests, another view consonant with

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[79]Novak, Free Persons, 83.

[80]Ibid., 31.

[81]Novak, Spirit, 359.

[82]Ibid., 67.

democracy.[83] Furthermore, when one accounts for human sin
and finitude, we must also acknowledge that no one is wise
enough or good enough to be trusted with great amounts of
power.[84] Not only would democratic capitalism as a
limited government and a separation of systems keep power
from becoming too concentrated, it also provides forums
for a variety of voices to be heard and courses of action
to be tolerated.

Assessing Novak's Ethic for Democratic Capitalism

Having delineated Novak's theological ethical
position on political democracy, we must assess its value
in helping us determine the shape of a normatively
adequate conception of political democracy. Our
discussion here, while focusing on the adequacy of Novak's
normative view of political democracy and the arguments he
offers for it, will also include some assessment of his
basic theological-ethical stance. As we saw with Yoder,
no clear line can be drawn between these two aspects of
the thought of a theological ethicist. Difficulties in
one dimension often carry over into other dimensions.

Novak's ethic of democratic capitalism offers
important insights. It provides a perspective sometimes

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[83]Ibid., 92.

[84]Ibid., 55-56.

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neglected in Christian social ethics. His ethic helps us
see that questions about political and economic systems
cannot be completely isolated from one another. While the
focus of our work remains democratic political systems,
the debates over the appropriate place of majoritarian and
minoritarian concerns in an adequate normative conception
of democracy are very relevant to the economic side of
political-economic systems. Certain conceptions of
democracy are more willing to give a positive role to
powerful business elites than certain other conceptions.

Novak also helps in his efforts to identify morally
relevant and morally praiseworthy aspects of capitalist
market economies. While his praise for market economies
is all to often uncritical, he reminds Christian ethicists
to take seriously the ways in which free market systems
have contributed to human well-being.

Novak's work deserves commendation in its effort to
take political theory seriously. He points theological
ethicists in a fruitful direction by engaging political
theorists such as Madison, von Mises, and Hayek. Still,
the level of this engagement remains inadequate. A number
of vital issues regarding an adequate conceptualization of
democracy are not given the attention they deserve,
including the issue of minoritarian and majoritarian
democracy. Novak may introduce these issues, but we often
have to piece together his positions on them.

Finally, Novak rightly acknowledges the transcendent and ultimate dimensions of Christian moral principles and argues for their relevance in the form of legitimate temporal standards. If one finally rejects the radical reformation position of a John Howard Yoder, the most fruitful position would seem to be one in which ultimate and transcendent standards are not rejected as utopian irrelevances but are seen as generative principles which give birth and shape to more immediately relevant moral principles. Novak's ethic takes this form, allowing for the possibility of moral achievement by political entities, even in the midst of human sin. Political democracy is judged by relevant moral standards and is viewed as a moral achievement.

However, when we dig more deeply into Novak's conception of the kind of democracy which represents a genuine moral achievement, we begin to encounter difficulties in his position. Novak's conception of democracy seems too indebted to his view of the historical achievement of the United States, and he remains too sanguine about the achievements of this particular society.

> Among existing societies... not many have better achieved the common good, or more deservedly won the love and loyalty of their citizens, than this quite imperfect, restlessly progressive nation.[85]

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[85]Novak, <u>Free Persons</u>, 8.

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While the United States has numerous positive
achievements, there is a danger in slipping past a
justifiable recognition of moral achievement into the
territory of uncritical appreciation. Novak recognizes
the difference between offering appropriate appreciation
of human moral achievement and uncritically "baptizing"
the persons or systems responsible as full expressions of
Christian moral principles. There are moments when he
seems to cross the line.[86] Novak rightly stresses the
need for Christian political ethicists to appreciate
genuine moral achievement. Nevertheless, Novak's efforts
to appreciate the political economy of the United States,
often couched in rather glowing terms, suggest that his
normative model of democracy borrows too heavily from
democracy as it exists, or might easily exist in the U.S.

Where Novak criticizes the existing political
economy of the U.S., he almost always criticizes the
tendency of the political realm to interfere in the
economic realm. Put another way, the primary realm of
social sin is in big government and not in large economic
enterprises nor in the uses of individual liberty. In
contrast to the often glowing language used to describe
free market economic activity, Novak describes politics as

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[86]Novak, _Spirit_, 345.

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"inevitably about favors, preferments, and awards influenced by power."[87] Novak argues that many religious political ethicists criticize economic life without an adequate criticism of political life. Novak's polemic against them commits a similar error in reverse. As Reinhold Niebuhr observed in his review of a book by Friedrich Hayek, one of Novak's favorite authors,

> No social philosophy dealing with one of two contrasting perils which modern society faces is adequate to our situation. Dr. Hayek sees the perils of political power clearly enough; but there is nothing in his book to indicate the slightest awareness of the perils of inordinate economic power.[88]

A similar criticism could be made of Novak. Though he occasionally displays an awareness of problems concerning economic power, his efforts in this area lack conviction. Great appreciation for certain aspects of the political-economic life of the U.S. lead him to an inadequate view of the possibilities of politics.

Novak's treatment of subsidiarity, community and the common good are also inadequate. The principle of subsidiarity promotes decision-making at "the level closest to concrete reality." Decisions move on to larger decision-making agencies only when the capacities of the smaller

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[87]Novak, Free Persons, 132.

[88]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Review of Frederich Hayek, The Road to Serfdom" (1944), in A Reinhold Niebuhr Reader, ed. Charles C. Brown (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1992), 142.

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ones appear inadequate to the task.[89] This explication of

the principle of subsidiarity is one-sided. It privileges

the private sector as against the public sector.[90] Let us

compare this conceptualization of the principle of

subsidiarity with one offered by another Catholic

political ethicist, David Hollenbach. For Hollenbach, the

principle of subsidiarity can be conceptualized as a

principle addressing the question of the moral justi-

fiability of government intervention in addressing social

problems and claims. It concludes that such government

action is justifiable "when it truly provides help to the

persons and smaller communities which compose society."[91]

Hollenbach agrees that subsidiarity gives priority to the

claims of smaller groups and associations within society,

but it also justifies state intervention when proper, an

important aspect of the principle which Novak rejects.

Frank Kirkpatrick questions the adequacy of Novak's

treatment of "community." Kirkpatrick argues that Novak's

idea of "community" is a version of an "atomistic/

contractarian model" of community, and that the

fundamental vision underlying Novak's understanding of

community remains one of individuals' cooperating for the

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[89]Novak, Spirit, 179. Novak, Free Persons, 125.

[90]Novak, Spirit, 236.

[91]David Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 157. See also, 157-163.

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purpose of fulfilling their own individual ends. Kirkpatrick seems right in arguing that, in spite of his occasional use of language that suggests a more relational view of human persons, Novak's position falls within contractarian views. Kirkpatrick goes on to argue that such models of human community are inadequate as fundamental understandings of persons-in-relation.[92]

Another area of Novak's thought which raises serious questions about the adequacy of his position is his treatment of the common good. On a very abstract and formal level, Novak's definition of the common good as achieving possibilities of unity in insight and love, in the midst of human sin, poses little difficulty. However, Novak most often focuses on the unity of the individual person with God and not on unity between persons. Novak runs into trouble when he begins to give this abstract definition greater content. This trouble arises primarily because of his almost exclusive concentration upon the liberty of individuals and his near total neglect of any conception of justice.

We noted that Novak subsumes the concept of justice under that of the common good. To claim that the common good is a more fundamental principle, and therefore one's understanding of justice ought to be decisively shaped by

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[92]Kirkpatrick, 42-44.

one's understanding of the common good, may be
justifiable. To move from that position to one in which
the concept of justice practically disappears is
unjustifiable. Given the importance of the concept of
justice to Christian social-political ethics, one ought to
give some shape to a conception of justice rooted in the
common good and show how some of the important concerns
represented by the concept of justice have been handled.
Novak fails to do this.[93]

We have noted potential contributions and
difficulties with Novak's political ethic. As one
reflects on the shortcomings, one can conclude that
perhaps the root problem is that Novak's relational
concepts remain rather flat or thin. Novak does a much
better job in discussing free persons in their individu-
ality, and the social institutions appropriate to such
persons, than he does discussing relational concepts such
as community, justice, or even the common good. Novak
fails to plumb the richness of human relatedness, much as
he accuses others of failing to grasp the richness of free
market economics.

This thinness in his discussion may be the
foundation for his rather negative view of political life.

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[93]This in contrast to Robert Benne, a
neoconservative who does not neglect the concept of
justice.

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Compare Novak to Yoder for a moment. Yoder saw discussion in group life as enriching persons and forming moral character. His positive evaluation of "democracy," understood eschatologically, is rooted in his view of its discursive aspects. Such democracy remains impossible for nation-states, though it ought to be an integral part of communities of Christian faith. One might argue that certain aspects of Yoder's vision are not as impossible as he asserts, particularly if one does not share Yoder's wider theological vision. Novak in his heart of hearts, does not seem able to conceive of a politics with such possibilities.

These difficulties find their way into Novak's normative conceptualization of democracy as primarily minoritarian. Novak does not consider the kind of rights protected in minority-protection democracy as an integral part of providing for public political participation. He focuses on the protection they offer from the political sphere. Novak is most concerned to protect participation in the nonpolitical public sphere of contractual, free market relations. These are viewed as the primary locus of creative, cooperative human activity. Obviously, political life does not exhaust the whole of public life. An enriching public life includes economic and other associational relations. Nevertheless, we cannot simply

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dismiss the positive possibilities of politics which Novak seems to reject.

These criticisms of Novak's views of important relational concepts give us reason to judge his political ethic of minoritarian democracy inadequate. Another reason for making this assessment lies in the fact that Novak never develops much of a case against certain aspects of majoritarian democracy. Certain features of majoritarian conceptions of democracy are incorporated into normative democracy. Novak is concerned to preserve majority rule over a strictly limited range of political decisions, yet he does not acknowledge the moral root of majoritarian democracy in the perceived importance of political action and political participation. We might expect him to engage majoritarian issues, but he simply neglects them. Nor does he address the objections of some to his case for strictly limited government. In the words of Philip Wogaman, "the limited state is not necessarily the responsible state."[94]

In assessing Novak's political ethic of democratic capitalism, we have discovered important ideas which ought to be part of an adequate Christian conception of political democracy, ideas primarily from the minoritarian side of the minoritarian-majoritarian debate. However, we

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[94]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 85.

also identified many significant difficulties with Novak's ethic and thus judge it insufficient as an adequate, theologically-rooted conception of political democracy. Not least among these difficulties is Novak's neglect of, rather than principled rejection of, the important moral concerns of majoritarian democracy. Novak finds it difficult to appreciate the moral force of the majoritarian position, in part, because of his attenuated understandings of human relationality and human community. The question, remains, however, whether richer understandings of human relationality necessarily lead to more majoritarian conceptions of political democracy or whether they might ground Novak's primarily minoritarian conception.

CHAPTER IV

J. PHILIP WOGAMAN'S LIBERAL
PROTESTANT ETHIC AND DEMOCRACY

Michael Novak's Neoconservative ethic is defined more by its political and economic views than by its theology. J. Philip Wogaman's liberal Protestant ethic provides a number of important contrasts with Novak. Wogaman offers a highly developed theological-ethical position as a grounding for his political ethic. His political and economic positions can be described as liberal, in contrast to Novak's neoconservativism. Wogaman identifies himself as a political liberal.[1] In his work in economic ethics, he argues for a connection between his Christian ethic and either social welfare capitalism or democratic socialism.[2] We begin our exploration of Wogaman's theologically-grounded political ethic with a discussion of its liberal Protestant context.

Wogaman states that his theological ethic represents a "mainstream liberal Christian" perspective. This

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[1]Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, Ch. 6.

[2]Wogaman, The Great Economic Debate (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 156-157. Wogaman, Christian Moral Judgement (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press), 167.

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perspective, as Wogaman understands it, includes both

Catholics and Protestants. This perspective generally

combines political liberalism and theological liberalism,

though it encompasses some evangelical theological

ethicists.[3] In identifying himself as a liberal

Protestant, Wogaman locates himself within a certain

tradition of theological thought.

An important distinction can be made between

"Liberal Protestantism" and a liberal perspective in

Christian theology.[4] In discussing the theological ethic

of Philip Wogaman as a liberal Protestant position, we use

both meanings.

"Liberalism," is an enduring perspective in

theology. Some of the themes which characterize it are:

1) openness to contemporary sciences, art and humanities;

2) application of historical methods to the study of

Scriptures; and 3) emphasis on the ethical implications of

Christianity.[5]

Liberal Protestantism refers to a theological

movement of the early part of this century and Wogaman's

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[3]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 102, 89-90.

[4]John Bowden and Alan Ricahrdson, ed. _The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology_ (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), articles on "Liberalism" and "Liberal Protestantism."

5Donald E. Miller, "Liberalism," in _The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology_, 324-325.

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theological lineage has roots in classical American Protestant liberalism. Wogaman wrote his doctoral dissertation under Walter Muelder, whose theological-ethical position was decisively shaped by the personalist philosophy and theology associated with Boston University. Muelder served as Professor of Social Ethics at Boston University School of Theology from 1945 to 1972, including time as Dean. Kenneth Cauthen, in his classic history of American Liberal Protestantism, wrote about Boston University, "Boston University is still the stronghold of theological liberalism of the personalistic type."[6]

Wogaman not only did his doctoral work at an institution with deep roots in classical American Liberal Protestantism, but some of the themes of that theological movement are found in Wogaman's theological ethic. Cauthen describes "liberal theology" as dominated by three motifs which came to characterize various strands of philosophical, scientific, religious, social, moral and literary thinking during the nineteenth century: 1) an emphasis on continuity with the world as opposed to discontinuity (the major motif); 2) a focus on the autonomy of human reason and experience as opposed to a focus on authoritative divine revelation; and 3) a focus

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[6]Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: The University Press of America, 1983), 110.

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on the dynamic nature of life and the world.[7] Wogaman
argues that the church is "not radically discontinuous, in
principle, from the larger society of which it is a
part."[8] He also argues that the reality of our fellow
humanity, based in God's love, can be realized to an
extent in human history.[9]

While Wogaman has roots in classical American
Liberal Protestantism, his own perspective takes account
of important criticisms of that earlier position. Wogaman
argues that his position is deeply influenced by the
thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr, particularly by Niebuhr's
view of human sin.[10] Niebuhr was critical of classical
American liberalism and Wogaman's appreciation of Niebuhr
represents a significant break with Walter Muelder.[11]
Wogaman argues that, given the reality of human sin, "we
are not going to be able to establish the Kingdom of God
on earth, as some of the earlier liberals has supposed."
Wogaman defines his stance as a contemporary liberal in

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[7]Cauthen, 6.

[8]Wogaman, Perspectives, 94. Cauthen, 11.

[9]Wogaman, Perspectives, 90. Cauthen, 11, 24.

[10]Wogaman, Perspectives, 91.

[11]Walter G. Muelder, The Ethical Edge of Christian
Theology (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 17-18.
Muelder, Moral Law in Christian Social Ethics (Richmond,
VA: John Knox Press, 1966; reprint, Lewiston, NY: Edwin
Mellen Press, 1984), 59.

terms of "Christ transforming culture" and a non-utopian politics inspired by the Kingdom of God.[12]

While this discussion shows why it is appropriate to ascribe the label "Liberal Protestant" to Wogaman's work, our aim is to explore his ethic on its own terms. We will explore the main features of Wogaman's theological ethic as a context for his political-ethical discussion of democracy. We will construct his normative model of political democracy, paying close attention to its majoritarian and minoritarian tendencies, and will search out the reasons Wogaman gives as to why democracy so conceived merits the support of Christian persons. Finally, we will assess his ethical position and its views on political democracy.

Wogaman's Basic Theological-Ethical Stance

Our discussion of Wogaman's basic theological-ethical stance is divided into two parts. We begin with a discussion of his theology, taking account of his views on religion, God, Christ and the human. We then discuss his reflections on ethical methodology.

Wogaman argues that "our metaphysical and ontological commitments are what give ultimate direction to our judgement and actions in the life of the world."[13]

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[12] Wogaman, Perspectives, 91, 93, 96.

[13] Wogaman, Economic Debate, 41.

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We do well, then, to consider his own metaphysical and ontological commitments as an important aspect of his theological ethics. Wogaman's metaphysical framework can be understood in terms of three concepts: reality, religion and metaphor.

For Wogaman, "the whole of reality" is a meaningful concept. However, the ultimate character of the whole of reality can never be fully known by human persons. Nevertheless,

> if we are to come to terms with the good in any ultimate sense, we must have some conception of how our particular values or moral rules or principles are grounded in relation to reality as a whole.[14]

We appear caught between a rock and a hard place. For Wogaman, ethics is an attempt "to understand our values critically in their ultimate context." How are we to know this context if the whole of reality can never be fully comprehended? We make judgements about the character of reality based upon what we do know and experience. "What we believe about reality as a whole is an expression of some aspects of reality that we take to convey the truth about everything else."[15]

It involves a measure of faith to base our understanding of the whole of reality on aspects of reality we

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[14]Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 15-16.

[15]Ibid., 16.

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take to provide the decisive clues to that whole.

Religion, as Wogaman defines it, is constituted by what we
believe to be true and good. It is an ultimate frame of
reference on the whole of reality.[16] The adequacy of any
particular religious faith rests in "its success in
drawing human experience into a believable focus."[17]

The essence of religion is the framework it provides
for our understanding of reality as a whole, constructed
on the basis of certain experiences we take to be decisive
about reality. Wogaman defines "metaphor" as any exper-
iences or aspects of experience that can function "as the
basis for interpreting the whole of reality."[18] Religion
must have an important metaphorical dimension to it. If
metaphors provide the basis for interpreting reality as a
whole, and our interpretation of and framework for
understanding reality is what constitutes our religion,
then religion must be rooted in metaphor.

The concept Wogaman uses to link metaphor and
religion is "revelation." "Revelation is what makes
everything come into focus or fall into place."[19]
Revelation reveals the character of an experience, person

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[16]Ibid., 15-16. Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 8.

[17]Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 171, n. 10.

[18]Ibid., 17.

[19]Ibid., 18.

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or event. Given Wogaman's understanding of metaphor,
revelation must have a metaphorical quality about it.
When revelation, through metaphor, reveals something about
the character of the whole of reality, then we have
"religious revelation."[20]

The concepts of reality, religion, metaphor, and
revelation give us the outline of Wogaman's metaphysical
and ontological commitments. However, an outline is about
all we get. Wogaman writes primarily as a Christian
ethicist, and he uses this metaphysical outline to discuss
his understanding of being a Christian. Being a Christ-
ian involves viewing reality through the metaphors "drawn
from the complex stream of Hebrew and Christian history
summarized in the Bible and Christian tradition."[21] For
Christian persons, the Bible serves as the primary locus
of religious and theological insight.[22] It provides
Christians the decisive clues as to the nature of reality
as whole and to what is most important about reality.
Among the important Christian metaphors are those re-
garding God, Jesus Christ and human existence.

For Wogaman, the nature of God and the character of
God's relationship to the world are central to the

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[20]Ibid., 18.

[21]Ibid., 18.

[22]Ibid., 133.

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Christian faith. God is the source of ultimate reality, and the source and center of all being and value.[23] Ultimately, the whole creation is responsive to God's purposes, even if human sin frustrates those purposes within history. This is part of what Wogaman means when he affirms that God transcends the finite world.[24] This transcendent God can never be fully known by anyone. At the same time, this transcending God "has unique, immediate access to all people."[25] One might understand Wogaman's affirmation that God created the world for good as one aspect of the grace of God which is available to all persons.[26] Wogaman conceives of the primary good for which the world was created by God as the mutual recognition between all persons of their fellow humanity.

> We are all sisters and brothers because God is our
> common parent.... The reality of our fellow humanity
> can be realized to some extent in human history.
> Indeed, this reality defines the meaning of human
> history and the purposes of God for human history.[27]

A Christian view of the whole of reality is understood in terms of the nature of God and of God's

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[23]Ibid., 19. Wogaman, Economic Debate, 42. Wogaman, Perspectives, 153.

[24]Wogaman, Perspectives, 152, 191.

[25]Ibid., 153, 191. Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 151-153.

[26]Wogaman, Economics and Ethics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 34.

[27]Wogaman, Perspectives, 90.

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creative activity. While God can never be fully known, the Christian understanding of God is based on the affirmation that Jesus Christ provides the decisive clue to the nature and activity of God. For Christian persons, the "Christ event" provides the "deepest revelation about the nature of God and of the covenant God has with humanity." "Christians are convinced that Jesus Christ is the decisive clue, the deepest disclosure, of how God is at work within and beyond human history."[28] Here Wogaman is in full agreement with Yoder, though their understandings of the meaning and moral implications of the revelation provided in Christ are very different.

Christian faith views reality in terms of the being and activity of God, activity often directed toward humanity. Human beings are created in the image of God which is reflected in human rationality, human freedom, human transcendence, and human creativity. It is also reflected in the human capacity to enter into relationships, including a covenant relationship with God.[29] Human relationality is important for Wogaman because human beings are both individual and social.[30]

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[28]Wogaman, *Moral Judgement*, 21. Wogaman, *Perspectives*, 277.

[29]Wogaman, *Moral Judgement*, 31-32.

[30]Ibid., 35, 129.

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The destruction of our individuality undermines genuine human society; the undermining of our social nature for the sake of individualism destroys not only society but our individuality as well.[31]

For Wogaman, genuine human fulfillment is found in being what we are created to be. This includes a continuing acknowledgment that human life is shared life. "It is a sharing of perceptions and values and language and purposes and identity."[32]

The fundamental moral norms in Wogaman's ethic are derived from the intersection of Wogaman's views that God created the world for good, including human good, and that this human good lies in being who we are created to be in the image of God. "Christian faith is a moral interpretation of the meaning of reality."[33] Ethics and the moral life are at the heart of Christian faith. Two normative concepts are particularly important in Wogaman's ethic, love and justice. We will discuss "justice" in our examination of Wogaman's political ethic.

"All Christians agree on the central importance of love."[34] "Love.. is the recognition of the indissoluble kinship we have with others by virtue of our unity in

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[31]Ibid., 120.

[32]Ibid., 32. Wogaman, Economics and Ethics, 21.

[33]Wogaman, Moral judgement, 72.

[34]Wogaman, Protestant Faith and Religious Liberty (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 71.

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God."[35] Love is an expression of mutuality and to live in accord with love involves being active, creative and, at times, even assertive in the social world.[36]

Love requires involvement in human institutional life. While love can never be perfectly represented in human institutions, it is "a mistake to think that human institutions cannot represent that love to greater or lesser degrees."[37] Love provides Christians with a norm to guide their actions, though "love may not unambiguously be translated into social policy." The translation of love into socio-political ethics requires other norms as well as knowledge about the nature of the complex world within which we live.[38]

Two dimensions of the human person which present challenges to the Christian moral life are finitude and sin. To be human is to be limited. We can never know all there is to know nor experience every human possibility. This does not mean we cannot be loving persons, only that our judgements about what is loving and right will have a tenuousness about them.[39]

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[35]Wogaman, Economic Debate, 42-42.

[36]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 84. Wogaman, Perspectives, 168.

[37]Wogaman, Economic Debate, 50.

[38]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 74-75. Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 38-40.

[39]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 99-100.

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The deeper challenge to living in accord with Christian moral norms is human sin. Wogaman argues that sin is a universal human phenomenon, with roots in human freedom and human insecurity.[40] In constructing his analysis of sin, Wogaman acknowledges his debt to Reinhold Niebuhr. Sin has its roots in the knowledge human persons have about their own finitude and in the anxiety such knowledge generates. "In our anxiety we are pushed deeply into self-centeredness, shoring up that self of ours in face of its apparent vulnerability." Sin is not merely self-centeredness; it is also a human rebelliousness against God.[41]

While sin is pervasive and universal, Wogaman argues that we can become too preoccupied with human sin in our theological-ethical thinking. We need "to take the reality of sin seriously, though not too seriously."[42] While sin is at work within everyone, so is grace. This grace of God, this power of God's love, works to overcome sin.[43] God's grace at work in justification makes love a possibility as it works to overcome human self-centered-

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[40]Ibid., 100. Wogaman, Perspectives, 91.

[41]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 32, 74.

[42]Wogaman, Economic Debate, 51. See also, Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 101.

[43]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 43. Wogaman, Economic Debate, 50.

ness. We are freed to seek the good. Christians are
called to struggle against sin.[44] It is God's love for
us, and our faith in that love, that finally frees us "to
be persons of courage and creativity" in the attempt to be
part of God's work within history.[45]

Wogaman's basic theological-ethical stance moves
beyond a moral interpretation of reality to offer a method
of Christian moral judgement. His chief concern in
Christian ethics is the development of this methodology
and its application to matters in socio-political ethics.

Wogaman argues that there has always existed a gap
between moral commitment and moral judgement.[46] While we
might be fully committed as Christian persons to live the
moral life God intends, such a commitment does not, by
itself, guarantee that our moral judgements about more
specific courses of action are right. Human beings are
finite and sinful. "The emerging question... is how we
are to go about judging so that our ethical uncertainty
will not frustrate our moral commitment."[47]

Wogaman offers a number of criteria for an adequate
method of Christian moral judgement. A Christian method

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[44]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 33. Wogaman,
Perspectives, 90.

[45]Wogaman, Perspectives, 277-278.

[46]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 40.

[47]Ibid., 41.

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of moral judgement must be both serious and flexible. Such a method must be tentative about specific moral judgements, given human sin and finitude. It should "express Christian theological insight in workable ethical form." Finally, it should help clarify moral dialogue by offering reasons why particular actions are chosen.[48]

Wogaman constructs his Christian method of moral judgement around two foci: theological entry points and moral presumptions. "The integrity of Christian ethics depends on its faithfulness to the central metaphors of faith."[49] He uses the idea of theological entry points as a way of bringing theological insights into Christian ethics. Certain Christian symbols, doctrines or metaphors provide richer insights into the moral life or specific moral problems than others.[50] Theological entry points particularly promising for Christian political ethics include: the sovereignty of God, the transcendence of God, human finitude, covenant, the theology of the cross, justification and grace, the doctrine of creation, original sin, eschatology, and ecclesiology.[51]

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[48]Ibid., 60, 96, 58.

[49]Ibid., 23.

[50]Ibid., 23. Wogaman, Perspectives, 114.

[51]Wogaman, Perspectives, 114-122.

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These theological entry points serve to develop and define presumptions for our moral decision-making. In fact, the whole concept of presumptions rests on a certain conviction, i.e., that God's action has regularities and continuities to it.[52] Presumptions, shaped by one's understanding of the nature of the whole of reality, provide points of reference for our decision-making. The burden of proof must be born by any course of action that seems to go against one's presumption of what ought to be done. Initial presumptions provide a basis for trying to make moral judgements in the tension between uncertainty and the need for action.[53] "We best organize problems of moral judgement by seeking to clarify our moral presumptions and requiring exceptions or deviations to bear the burden of proof."[54] One of the important tasks for ethical reflection is that of clarifying and modifying initial presumptions on the basis of our ultimate value commitments.[55]

Presumptions not only guide moral action, they influence moral judgement. Procedural presumptions favor moral judgements made as a result of following certain procedures. Ideological presumptions also influence moral

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[52]Ibid., 123. Wogaman, *Moral Judgement*, 72, 48.

[53]Wogaman, *Moral Judgement*, 60-62.

[54]Ibid., 8.

[55]Ibid., 63.

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judgement. An ideology, in Wogaman's parlance, is a model
of reality which embodies certain moral principles.
Empirical presumptions shape our views of the factual
situations in which we act. We bring presumptions about
authority into our moral judgements as well as
presumptions about which of our presumptions have priority
over others.[56]

Wogaman's Christian method of moral judgement, then,
begins with presumptions, which are shaped by our ultimate
commitments. Normative presumptions force a burden of
proof upon those who would break with them. Such
presumptions bear on the facts of lived situations.[57]
These reflections guide our moral judgements about what we
ought to do. When a variety of presumptions seem relevant
to the same situation, and these presumptions seem to
conflict, Wogaman argues that we are then challenged to
think more deeply. In particular, we are driven back to
thinking about the nature of our ultimate center of
value.[58] In an illuminating comparison, Wogaman thinks
that his proposed method of Christian moral judgement has
parallels to the prima facie duties method proposed by the
moral philosopher W.D. Ross.[59]

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[56]Ibid., 68-71.

[57]Ibid., 62, 67, 51-53.

[58]Ibid., 67. Wogaman, Perspectives, 124.

[59]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 177, n. 9.

Wogaman's Christian Political Ethic

Wogaman brings his basic theological-ethical stance and the method of moral judgement which is its centerpiece to his reflection on politics. The task of Christian political ethics is to relate fundamental Christian convictions to political life. It involves correlating theology and social policy.[60] Christians must utilize secular as well as theological resources, but secular resources are insufficient in themselves. They fail to provide a sufficiently deep and illuminating perspective on our political life. "Any political philosophy remains incomplete unless it has reference to a vision of what is ultimately true and ultimately good."[61]

The introduction of the idea of vision is important. The moral presumptions in Wogaman's socio-political ethic are grounded in "a theological vision for society," a Christian vision of what is ultimately true and good.[62] We need overall normative conceptions and "ideal models" to help us in our political-ethical thinking.[63] Wogaman's socio-political ethic can be characterized as an ethic centered in a moral vision.

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[60]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 109, 113. Wogaman, _Religious Liberty_, 9.

[61]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 110.

[62]Ibid., 211.

[63]Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 154, 167-168.

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For Wogaman, a Christian political ethic involves a politics for change inspired by the Kingdom of God. "Christians seek a society of love, mutual support, and caring - one in which the well-being and human fulfillment of each is the goal and celebration of all."[64] God intends a community of love and justice.[65] In one essay, Wogaman discusses "visions of the common good," but the place of this concept in his ethic is unclear, as we shall see.[66] It is clear, however, that Wogaman gives the idea of moral vision an important place in his Christian political ethic.

While Wogaman makes a case for the importance of moral vision he also argues that complete achievement of this broad vision for human social life is not possible within history as we know it, given human limitations and human sin. Here Wogaman agrees with the realist criticisms of early liberal Protestantism. The full realization of the Kingdom of God will be eschatological. Given the reality of human sin, possibilities for moral achievement within history, while real, remain limited and provisional. Furthermore, in light of human sin and

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[64]Wogaman, Perspectives, 240.

[65]Wogaman, A Christian Method of Moral Judgement (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 240.

[66]Wogaman, "The Common Good and Economic Life: A Protestant Perspective" in The Common Good and U.S. Capitalism, ed., Oliver E. Williams and John W. Houck.

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finitude, one needs to be skeptical about human power. We ought not rely on social policies that assume the perfection or perfectibility of human persons.[67]

Yet formulating a Christian socio-political vision remains important because the Kingdom of God can be relatively approximated. The world has penultimate significance. God's purposes can be helped or hindered by what happens within human history.[68] Here Wogaman's political ethic differs significantly from Yoder's. For both, the full realization of the Kingdom of God is future. Yoder argues that Christians ought to be faithful witnesses to that vision, regardless of the immediate consequences of such witness. For Wogaman, faithfulness to the vision means working for the establishment of socio-political structures that offer some approximate realization of the vision. Such approximate realizations have penultimate significance.

Wogaman's political ethic does not remain on this visionary level. He formulates normative principles rooted in this vision, and in theological entry points. A good beginning point for discussing the norms which comprise Wogaman's political ethic is with the norm of the

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[67]Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 98-99, 102, 103, 127. Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 91, 152.

[68]Wogaman, _Method_, 220, 221. Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 24-25. Wogaman, _Economic Debate_, 45-46.

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"responsible society" which figured prominently in the
ethic of Walter Muelder. The responsible society is a
normative ideal model, and here we need to distinguish
between moral vision and ideal models. The concept of
vision has aesthetic connotations. It is closer to
Wogaman's understanding of metaphor. Ideal models, on the
other hand, carry a different emphasis, more conceptual.
They function as more directly action-guiding, though even
ideal models present a norm beyond our reach. Ideal
models are generated out of moral vision. An ideal model
provides an overall normative conception within which
other normative principles fit. Political ideal models
ought to function as operative ideals, ideals that guide
political life.[69]

"The responsible society" is an early and enduring
theme in Wogaman's work. The definition of the concept is
taken from a 1948 WCC Conference.

> A responsible society is one where freedom is the
> freedom of men who acknowledge the responsibility to
> justice and public order, and where those who hold
> political authority or economic power are responsible
> for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare
> is affected by it.[70]

As a normative ideal model, the responsible society
entails a responsible political order constructed around

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[69]On operative ideals see, A.D. Lindsay, The Modern
Democratic State (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
Originally published 1943), 37-51.

[70]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 158.

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freedom, order, and justice. It also implies a
responsible state, i.e., a state responsible to its people
and responsible for the quality of their life together.[71]

In a recent essay, Wogaman suggests that the
responsible society can be a synonym for the common
good.[72] "The commitment by Christians to a 'common good'
transcending purely individual interests enjoys deep
support in both Catholic and Protestant traditions." In
fact there is wide consensus among Christians that "the
common good has an overriding claim upon the Christian
conscience."[73]

Wogaman understands the concept of the common good
to mean that the good of each person is contained in the
good of all. "The common good" stands for the claim that
the good of each person is diminished when the good of
other persons is diminished. The concept of the common
good represents a recognition of the social nature of
humanity. Beyond these characterizations, Wogaman finds
that the concept of justice plays an important role in
understanding the meaning of the common good, though
"justice" can be defined in various ways as well.[74]

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[71]Ibid., 158-159, 161.

[72]Wogaman, "Common Good," 90.

[73]Ibid., 84, 89.

[74]Ibid., 91-94.

While the common good has the characteristics proposed above further definition of its meaning ought to occur in social interaction. Wogaman argues that society as a whole has some responsibility for both defining and implementing visions of the common good.

> The definition of common good is the proper object of the ongoing debate of a free people, and the implementation of common good is no less important an object of that debate.[75]

Participation in the life of the community, and the prerequisites for such participation, thus form another dimension of the common good.[76]

Wogaman does not relate his views on covenant and community to his view of the common good, yet these concepts ought to be part of that discussion. The concept of covenant is an important entry point for theological-ethical reflection on politics.[77] Because the Christian conception of covenant is inclusive of all persons, all political divisions are relativized. The implication for the common good is that it must finally include the whole human community. Wogaman says as much in his article, though without reference to "covenant."[78] Christian covenantal understandings of human life are communitarian,

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[75]Ibid., 102.

[76]Ibid., 99-100.

[77]Wogaman, Perspectives, 116-117.

[78]Wogaman, "Common Good," 89.

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but also provide a basis for individual identity.[79]
Wogaman does not spell out the relationship between com-
munitarianism and individual identity, but rightly insists
that covenant encompasses both.

"Covenant" provides the context within which to
understand community. God initiates covenantal
relationships with humankind and this provides the true
basis for human community. Vital community is God's good
intention for humanity and God's own covenant-forming
action provides the deepest foundations for it.[80]

Given Wogaman's reflections on covenant and commun-
ity, it is surprising that he does not make more use of
them in his discussion of the common good. Beyond that,
and contrary to what he wrote in his article on the common
good, "the common good" itself does not play an explicitly
vital role in Wogaman's Christian political ethic.
Outside of this single article, there are few references
to this concept in Wogaman's work. While he uses "the
responsible society" as a nearly functional equivalent of
"the common good," explicit and sustained reflection on
the common good would be more consistent with his as-
sertion of its importance for Christian political ethics.

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[79]Wogaman, Perspectives, 157.

[80]Ibid., 116. Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 84.
Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 20-21.

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The responsible society and the common good serve as normative ideal models in Wogaman's political ethic, that is, broad conceptions of the good society informed by theological vision and intended to be more conceptual and directly action-guiding than the visions themselves. Moral ideal models incorporate other normative principles: justice, rights, equality, and freedom. The understanding of these concepts is shaped by theological entry points and these principles, in turn, serve as moral presumptions. These various principles, understood together, ought to do much of the work of defining the normative ideal models, insofar as they can be defined prior to socio-political discussion and debate, but Wogaman tends not to synthesize his ethical reflection in this way.

There are passages in Wogaman's work where justice takes on the character of a normative ideal model. "Justice includes the whole of our normative view of proper human relationships, rights, and duties within the community."[81] While Wogaman is entitled to define justice in this way, and perhaps propose "the just society" as a normative ideal model, he ought to decide whether justice or the common good, with justice as a primary defining characteristic, will function as his ideal model.

Other passages in Wogaman's work suggest that he is willing to define justice less expansively. There justice

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[81]Wogaman, <u>Moral Judgement</u>, 71.

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consists of a number of moral claims. One aspect of

justice is "the moral claim of every person to be accepted

as a person by the rest of society."[82] This is a claim of

each person on each other person for recognition as a

fellow human being. Wogaman argues that the Bible tends

to view justice as the "equitable provision" for each

person to share in the material conditions of life.[83]

This is a claim of each person on society as a whole.

Another such claim which is part of justice sees it as

"the community's guarantee of the conditions necessary for

everybody to be a participant in the common life of

society."[84]

These various claims which comprise justice involve

recognition of the importance of the social whole but also

imply "respect for the civil and material rights of

individuals."[85] Human persons are capable of justice,

though its achievement is a matter of degree. Justice

ought to be "the primary topic for civil discourse."[86]

Here again, there is a tension in Wogaman's thought

between his views on the relative importance of justice

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[82]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 173.

[83]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 73.

[84]Wogaman, Perspectives, 158.

[85]Wogaman, "Common Good," 95.

[86]Wogaman, Perspectives, 91, 159.

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and the common good. If the common good presents us with overriding claims, then it might be better to say that justice ought to be a primary topic of civil discourse and not the primary topic.

One might argue that rights form the core of Wogaman's understanding of justice. Wogaman's basic characterization of a right is as "a moral claim upon the community which the community recognizes and endeavors to honor."[87] The point of the latter part of this definition of rights seems to be that recognition of what rights exist and ought to be honored arises out of the moral perception and consciousness of the community.[88] However, Wogaman's discussion of rights seems predicated on the assumption that certain rights ought to be part of the moral consciousness of any community.

Beyond being moral claims, rights, particularly the right to religious liberty, are an expression of respect for the transcendent life of each person. While human beings are social by nature, individual rights help protect persons against false community with its tendency towards idolatry and its pressures toward conformity.[89] This conception of the function of rights suggests that

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[87]Ibid., 218.

[88]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 170-171.

[89]Wogaman, Perspectives, 196-197, 157.

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Wogaman recognizes that sin can, and often does, warp our moral ideals and principles.

In establishing and guaranteeing rights "the state constitutes the manner of its own life" in tune with the ethical perceptions of the community. In establishing and guaranteeing rights, the state might either refrain from acting or intervene in society.[90] Here Wogaman differs from Novak who tends to view restraint of state action as the paradigmatic case of the state respecting rights. For Novak, rights are concomitant with the principle of subsidiarity, by which he means that decisions ought to be made at the level closest to concrete reality. Rights, by requiring the restraint of state action, allow decisions to be made more readily at those concrete levels. For Wogaman, subsidiarity means that "social problems should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level consistent with their solution."[91] This is consistent with a more positive view of government action.[92] Another important difference between Novak and Wogaman on the issue of rights is the emphasis Wogaman gives to rights to participate in the political life of the community.[93]

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[90]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 171-172.

[91]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 122.

[92]Wogaman, Perspectives, 99.

[93]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 172-173.

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Such rights reflect Wogaman's view that one dimension of the common good is participation in the life of the political community. Rights to participate, along with other rights, are important to democracy. "For democracy to function, it is important to insist upon the rights of all, including oneself."[94]

That rights of all persons ought to be respected implies a certain equality between all persons. Human equality "is implied in the value individual persons have through their relationship with God."[95] God loves each person totally and values each infinitely. This love of God for each person provides the ground for human unity in community. "Unity in relationship implies mutuality."[96] Mutuality, in turn, implies a certain equality between persons, for to be be engaged in a relationship of mutuality requires mutual recognition of the humanity of each person in the relationship. Essential human equality does not mean that we ought to strive for absolute equality between persons within historical existence. Such absolute equality is both impossible and inadvisable.[97] Absolute equality is impossible because of the natural distribution of talents and abilities among

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[94]Wogaman, Perspectives, 168.

[95]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 89.

[96]Ibid., 90.

[97]Ibid., 91.

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persons. It is inadvisable because the utilization of these different abilities tends to benefit the whole society.

The normative principle of the equality of persons has political ramifications. It provides one normative ground for the responsible state. "This equality entails equal concern by the state for the welfare of every man."[98] The principle of equality also has implications for Wogaman's conception of majority rule and political democracy, as we shall see.

Justice, rights and equality are traditional normative concerns within Western political-ethical thought as is freedom. "Regard for the value of personal life also entails a strong presumption for personal freedom." The core meaning of freedom is the freedom "to be and to express one's selfhood." As one's relationship to what they understand to be ultimately true, good and real is a crucial aspect of one's selfhood, Wogaman argues that religious liberty is perhaps the basic freedom. Such liberty includes all the forms of traditional civil liberties such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom from arbitrary search and arrest, and freedom to assemble.[99]

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[98]Wogaman, _Religious Liberty_, 164-165.

[99]Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 82-83.

Again in something of a contrast to Novak, Wogaman argues that freedom can be enhanced by the action of the state.[100] Furthermore, freedom must be understood in conjunction with responsibility. "In a theological perspective we speak of God's gift of freedom and of human responsibility before God for the exercise of that freedom."[101] The two must be held in tension. One political implication of this position is that freedom requires a context of responsibility for its preservation, meaning that neither anarchism nor totalitarianism can be justified.[102] Put another way, Wogaman exhibits an appreciation for freedom, justice, and order, understood together.[103]

The normative ideal models and principles of Wogaman's political ethic are intended to guide socio-political life. Wogaman provides a useful service as he identifies and defines important concepts which help us understand the nature of politics and the life of a political community. Our examination of his political ethic would be incomplete without discussing his understanding of the state, government, politics, and power.

Wogaman distinguishes between the state and society.

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[100]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 160.

[101]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 121.

[102]Ibid., 122.

[103]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 158-159.

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He defines the state as "society acting as a whole, with the ultimate power to compel compliance within its own jurisdiction."[104] He emphasizes the first part of that definition, society acting as a whole. However, once decisions are made by society as a whole, by whatever processes they use, compliance with those decisions should be enforced by the state. In exercising its power to compel, the state has the power of coercion at its disposal. In fact, the state is "the location of the supreme power within a society."[105]

While the state is the location of the supreme power in society, "society itself is the sovereign source of political power." The term "sovereignty" refers to "supreme, self-sufficient political power."[106] For Wogaman, the state exists "as an embodiment of the will of the people" and its basic objective will be "defined by moral consensus as to the ideal society."[107] "Consensus" might be misleading here. Wogaman's point is that the moral consciousness of the people in society provides the

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[104]Wogaman, *Perspectives*, 13. Wogaman, *Religious Liberty*, 83.

[105]Wogaman, *Perspectives*, 18. Wogaman, *Moral Judgement*, 158.

[106]Wogaman, *Perspectives*, 19. Wogaman, *Religious Liberty*, 156.

[107]Wogaman, *Perspectives*, 13. Wogaman, *Religious Liberty*, 162.

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material out of which basic directions for society will be formed.

Citizens provide direction for society acting as a whole, i.e., they help to decide what actions the state should take. Citizens are also responsible then to the outcome of the processes by which state action is decided. The life of society is enriched by the dialogue which takes place regarding the direction it should take when it acts as a whole.[108]

By what institutional mechanism does the state act? "The state usually acts through government," and "government... is the implementation of the state."[109] The primary way in which government embodies and insti- tutionalizes the state is through making and interpreting laws, i.e., policies binding upon the society. "Public policy represents the directions taken by government on behalf of the state."[110] With this ability to formulate and enforce policy, government possesses ultimate power over the whole socio-political system.[111] In other words, government comes to exercise the power of the state, which

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[108]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 146. Wogaman, Perspectives, 159.

[109]Wogaman, Perspectives, 26. Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 154.

[110]Wogaman, Perspectives, 27.

[111]Wogaman, Method, 234.

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is ultimately derived from the people themselves. Government is the primary institution which gives force to the will of the people.[112]

Government is essentially designed to carry out the direction of the people acting as a whole. Both the state and government ought to be "responsible." The state ought to be responsible both to the people from whom it derives its power and for the common life of that people.[113] Government, as an institutional embodiment of the state, ought also be responsible in both these senses.

> If the state represents society acting as a whole, and if government is therefore formally responsible to all the people, why should it not also be explicitly responsible to all the people?[114]

Wogaman argues that the government is responsible when it exhibits an appreciation for the norms of freedom, justice and order. It is also responsible when it affirms the capacity of people for self-government. When it is responsible, government is a positive force in society. Again in contrast to Novak Wogaman argues that government ought to play an important role in making economic decisions.[115]

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[112]Wogaman, "Common Good," 101.

[113]Wogaman, _Religious Liberty_, 161.

[114]Ibid., 157.

[115]Ibid., 158-159. Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 98, 221, 229. Wogaman, _Moral Judgement_, 123.

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Wogaman's understanding of politics fits well with his conceptualizations of the state and government. "Politics is... the civil community ordering its life together on the basis of the public good."[116] Part of this ordering process involves struggling for the power to determine what the community is to do. Politics is a process by which the power to determine how the society will act as a whole is organized and utilized. Political processes determine what decisions will be made, who will make them and how they will be made. "Politics deals with real power, contributing either to justice and human well-being or to injustice and inhumanity."[117] Though politics has to do with processes and power, we must also remember that "politics is, in large measure, about issues."[118] Every person within a society participates in politics to some extent, whether they want to or not.[119]

Politics has a deep significance, for Wogaman. "The world of politics is a place of encounter between humanity and God."[120] In other words politics, as part of historical human existence, has penultimate significance. Achieving justice and human well-being is part of God's intention for humanity. These can be achieved through

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[116]Wogaman, Perspectives, 11.

[117]Ibid., vii.   [118]Ibid., 158.

[119]Ibid., vii.   [120]Ibid., 276.

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politics, and their achievement has penultimate significance.

Politics has to do with issues and with power. Wogaman defines power as the capacity to achieve desired ends. Political power is the capacity to control and integrate the power resources of the entire society.[121] It is "the power to influence the will and political behavior of people."[122] Political power is something over which persons struggle, particularly in the form of a struggle over control of the government. Government brings to focus the power of the various social systems comprising a national society. Those who prevail in the struggle for political power and control of the government take the prominent role in deciding what society will do when it acts as a whole.[123]

Political power arises from human will, and influences that will. "Every human interest or value having any influence over the will of any person is potentially a form of political power."[124] While the struggle for power is significant, more significant is how that power is used once it is gained. Political power

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[121]Wogaman, _Religious Liberty_, 150-152.

[122]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 24.

[123]Ibid., 27-28. Wogaman, _Method_, 234.

[124]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 22, 20.

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ought to be used for justice and human well-being. It

ought also be used in accord with the desires of the

people of any political society. Strangely, Wogaman does

not discuss a concept of "responsible power." He does

distinguish between power and authority. Authority is

power used in a manner approved of by society; it is

"legitimate" power.[125] Legitimacy of political power is

also a moral concept, reflecting the judgement by a people

that its government is truly acting in a manner consistent

with its essential nature as an embodiment of society

acting as a whole. One way to keep political power

responsive to the people, and thus responsible, is to

avoid concentrations of various kinds of power.

The normative principles discussed in this section,

beyond their use in shaping political processes and goals

also function as principles by which Christian persons can

judge the moral adequacy of political systems. The whole

discussion of political processes and moral principles

brings us to the doorstep of Wogaman's discussion of

political democracy.

Wogaman On Political Democracy

Our examination of Wogaman's thinking about

political democracy will begin with a discussion of the

defining characteristics of democracy. We then move to

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[125]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 152.

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Wogaman's Christian ethical case for democracy so
conceived. Finally, we focus on the place majoritarian
and minoritarian concerns seem to occupy in Wogaman's view
of democracy.

Wogaman refers to democracy as an "ideal model" or
an "ideology."[126] An ideology is defined in terms of "a
complex weaving together of values and beliefs," which
contain "some conception of the good."[127] Here the
concept of an ideal model has a narrower cast than
discussed earlier. Previously we defined normative ideal
models as models for the good society rooted in a
normative Christian vision. Democracy as an ideal model
would seem to be a component of a more encompassing ideal
model, like "the responsible society." As with the
broader ideal models, political democracy as an ideal
model is a historical possibility, but its realization
will never be consistent and complete.

Wogaman defines the democratic ideology in terms of
four normative principles: popular sovereignty, equality,
majority rule, and guaranteed civil rights and
liberties.[128] Slightly different emphases appear in other
works. In Christian Perspectives on Politics, political

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[126]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 160. Wogaman, Economic
Debate, 11.

[127]Wogaman, Economic Debate, 10-11.

[128]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 160ff.

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democracy is defined in terms of the principles of formal
equality and formal rights. In another passage in that
same work, democracy is a political order "embodying equal
civil rights and participation in political power."[129]
Each of these other characterizations of the nature of
democracy can be combined into the principles of popular
sovereignty, equality, majority rule, and civil rights.
At the outset, Wogaman's normative conceptualization of
democracy appears to combine majoritarian and minoritarian
concerns.

More can be said about Wogaman's understanding of
this ideal. A democratic political order "makes it
possible for people to participate in determining what
they will, as members of society, be committed to do."[130]
Persons in a democratic political order have voice and
vote. Political democracy does not guarantee just out-
comes, but instead provides open channels for criticism
and change. In a democratic system, all issues are
finally open, even as policy decisions are made and acted
upon.[131]

To keep the socio-political processes truly open,
Wogaman argues that certain institutional structures are

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[129]Wogaman, Perspectives, 150-151, 162.

[130]Ibid., 147.

[131]Ibid., 159-161. Wogaman, "Common Good," 101.
Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 167.

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important. Political parties have an important role here.[132] Democracy requires a range of mediating structures and institutions along with "a good deal of personal freedom." Wogaman cites the wisdom embodied in the principle of subsidiarity to support his position on the importance of freedom and mediating institutions for democracy.[133]

The institutions and structures important for political democracy include participatory institutions, i.e., institutions which provide for the participation of citizens in the political process. The kind of participation which has particular significance for Wogaman is dialogue or discussion. "The essence of democracy is its openness to political debate, behind which lies a dialogue over what really matters in the common life."[134] This view of democracy has its companion in the political theory of A. D. Lindsay, who argued that "discussion is the essential characteristic of demo- cracy."[135] For Wogaman, the very basis for the unity of the state is the dialogue of free persons. Dialogue is both an end and a means to an end.[136] It is the means by

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[132]Wogaman, Economic Debate, 127.

[133]Wogaman, "Common Good," 101.

[134]Wogaman, Perspectives, 197-198, 159.

[135]Lindsay, Modern Democratic State, 166.

[136]Wogaman, Religious Liberty, 168, 246.

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which, eventually, society will decide who it will be and what it will do. It is an end, for in the dialogic process, persons engage one another and such engagement has its own value. Wogaman considers participation in the form of dialogue so important to political democracy that democratic societies ought to make provisions to satisfy the economic preconditions necessary for such participation. He warns that great concentrations of wealth tend to affect democratic processes adversely.[137]

Given Wogaman's conception of the democratic ideal, it is no wonder he argues that "democracy is hard work." It requires a degree of commitment to the common good as a common purpose. This, in turn, requires "habits of mind and heart that dispose us to cooperate with one another toward the common good." Wogaman dubs such habits "democratic disciplines" and includes among them: temperance, courage, prudence, justice, ability to compromise, respect for others, and recognition of one's limitations. These disciplines "imply personal commitments transcending the political process itself along with deep commitment to that process."[138] Human sin provides one strong reason why democracy, as an ideal model, can be realized only in part.

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[137]Wogaman, Guaranteed Annual Income (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 123. Wogaman, Perspectives, 128. Wogaman, Economic Debate, 91.

[138]Wogaman, Perspectives, 170-172.

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All of the above elements comprise Wogaman's
normative conception of political democracy. Within his
work, we can identify two distinct Christian political-
ethical arguments in support of democracy so conceived.
One argument asserts that the democratic ideal is more in
accord with Christian insights than other potential models
for organizing political life. Wogaman constructs this
argument by combining insights garnered from three
theological entry points.

(1) The first theological entry point which lends
support to political democracy is the idea of the
sovereignty of God. "The transcending sovereignty of God
also means... that the source and center of all being and
value also has unique, immediate access to all people."[139]
While God cannot be fully known by anyone, God might
reveal Godself to anyone. God may communicate the truth
about reality to and through persons anywhere. These
theological insights offer strong support, in Wogaman's
mind, for the self-correcting and self-criticizing
political system he understands democracy to be.[140]

(2) While God might communicate truth to and through
persons anywhere, human beings have a penchant for
misunderstanding, misconstruing, even misrepresenting the

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[139]Ibid., 153.

[140]Ibid., 191-192, 153. Wogaman, <u>Religious Liberty</u>,
144-145.

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truth. This is part of Wogaman's view of human sin, and
it can be offered in support of political democracy.
Given the reality of human sin, no one ought to be trusted
with great amounts of power. "A democratic society erects
a fabric of controls, of checks and balances."[141] The
possibility for citizens to openly criticize elected
officials, and to vote them out of office, gives all
persons some political power while checking the power of
those in government.

(3) Finally, the theology of creation and grace
provide support for political democracy. Human persons,
as created in the image of God, have a capacity for
justice, decency, and public-spiritedness which is never
eliminated in spite of human sin. The grace of God, oper-
ative in human history, opens up possibilities for the
effective exercise of the better angels of human nature.
As this grace is available to all, the judgement of the
whole community about its life together is generally more
reliable than the judgement of any "self-appointed
elite."[142]

The insights derived from these theological entry
points, when considered together, make a strong case for

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[141]Wogaman, Perspectives, 153.

[142]Ibid., 154-155.

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political democracy. In an earlier work, though, Wogaman constructed another case for democracy, rooted in the ideal of the responsible society.

A responsible state will include political institutions which make it possible for the widest number of people to participate in the political process. A responsible state recognizes the importance of political participation in the form of dialogue and thus "allows full rein to the ferment of disagreement and dialogue." The conflict which often accompanies dialogue can be healthy for the society. Wogaman argues that Christians ought to bring their unique and valuable insights to political dialogue.[143]

A responsible state also recognizes the importance and necessity of state action for the common good. In addition to institutionalizing participatory and dialogic structures, a responsible state will institutionalize decision-making procedures which identify the point at which a responsible decision can be made. Wogaman argues that majority rule has historically characterized democratic societies, and that such a decision rule can be viewed as a consequence of the responsible state's assumption of the political equality of all its citizens. While a responsible state tends to institutionalize

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[143]Wogaman, _Religious Liberty_, 163, 175-176, 221-222.

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majority rule, it will also provide for the protection of political minorities to preserve their ability to continue to participate in the ongoing political process.[144]

If we were to wrap together these two arguments for political democracy as a normative model for Christian political ethics, we might argue that the theological entry points ground the normative ideal model of the responsible society, which has as one of its central features an ideal of political democracy. The theological entry points also help to interpret, understand and further justify political democracy as a feature of a responsible state.

All this adds up to the point that, in Wogaman's Christian political ethic, democracy is a central norm for organizing political life. Political democracy serves as a normative presumption for Christians.[145] Christian virtues can and should contribute to the disciplines needed within democratic societies. The church has an obligation to engage in dialogue about the meaning of Christian faith for important political issues. The church ought to be active in shaping the life of the

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[144]Ibid., 164-165.

[145]Wogaman, Perspectives, 163-166. Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 162.

larger society through the mechanisms of political democracy.[146]

Normative presumptions can be overridden, however. In keeping with this, Wogaman argues that the establishment of political democracy might legitimately be delayed if social conditions warrant. Among the conditions which might justify the temporary use of nondemocratic and more authoritarian methods of governing are the following: a disaster in which the basic needs of the population might go unmet; the danger of a greater or more permanent despotism in the future; the temporary authoritarian regime is committed to its own laws; democratic elements are protected as much as possible during the emergency conditions; the authoritarian regime commits itself to frequent review and offers a specific timetable for instituting democracy.[147] We ought always be sensitive to the actual historical and cultural conditions to which we would apply this norm.[148]

Let us pursue the question of the place Wogaman gives majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in his normative conception of democracy. His conception of political democracy intentionally includes majoritarian

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[146]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 173, 99, 200-207. Wogaman, _Religious Liberty_, 223.

[147]Wogaman, _Perspectives_, 164-165.

[148]Ibid., 162.

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and minoritarian elements. Wogaman appreciates the
normative concerns within both conceptions of democracy.
He argues that a political system based solely on majority
rule, without the guarantee of certain basic rights,
cannot be a Christian ideal.[149] Good democratic theory
must include both majority rule and minority rights.

A number of the normative principles which comprise
Wogaman's political ethic support some of the traditional
concerns of minority-protection models of democracy.
Normative principles of justice, equality, and freedom all
might support certain minoritarian concerns, but it is
primarily the principle of freedom that Wogaman utilizes
in support of protection for political minorities.
Wogaman grounds the moral principle of freedom in human
individuality.[150] The dignity of the individual requires
that persons be given a great deal of freedom, hence the
need for rights which protect such freedom, including
rights against political majorities.

Wogaman's concern for the protection of political
minorities also arises out of his perception that simple
majoritarianism, in which political majorities decide
whatever issues they see fit to decide, poses serious
moral questions. "Majority rule can be a prescription for

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[149]Wogaman, Method, 239.

[150]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 121.

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disaster if most people are self-centered or corrupt."[151]
This statement serves as a premise in arguments both for
the protection of political minorities through a system of
rights and for the need to nurture democratic disciplines.
Self-centered or corrupt political majorities might govern
simply on their own behalf, granting themselves social
benefits with little regard for the good of the whole
society. However, the gravest danger presented by
political majorities run amok appears to be the danger
that they might dominate those political minorities which
oppose them, taking away the rights and freedoms necessary
for their continued participation in the political
process.[152]

In the face of these potential dangers, Wogaman
argues for "a well-defined, well-respected system of civil
rights."[153] However, when Wogaman discusses rights, he
tends to move beyond the view of minority-protection
democracy which sees rights primarily in terms of their
protective value. In Wogaman's view, rights are not meant
simply to protect persons and groups from the wider
society and the state. More importantly they are intended
to guarantee that all persons can participate in the

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[151]Wogaman, Perspectives, 169.

[152]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 83.

[153]Wogaman, Perspectives, 169.

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political decision-making processes. The emphasis on
political participation, and a view of rights primarily
focused on such participation, is more compatible with
majoritarian models of democracy. An emphasis on the
importance of political participation, rooted in normative
principles, is not the simple province of majoritarian
democracy. Minoritarian democracy might also value
political participation, though political theorists who
argue for such normative models of democracy tend not to
emphasize the importance of participation. Furthermore,
minoritarian models tend to place political participation
in the context of a more strictly limited state. On the
issue of a limited state, Wogaman's normative democratic
theory is more majoritarian.

Wogaman is not an advocate of the kind of strictly
limited state either Yoder or Novak might find congenial.

> The state must be strong enough to enact the end
> results of a thoroughly democratic process while fully
> respecting the continued freedom of opposition....
> The limited state is not necessarily a responsible
> state.[154]

Wogaman seems to be thinking in terms of a strictly
limited state. In a rather interesting passage, Wogaman
asserts that the creation of constitutional government in
the United States, with its guarantee of political and
civil rights, should be seen as a self-limitation of the

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[154]Ibid., 85. See also, 75-77.

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state. Such self-limitation is morally required by the
ideal of the responsible state, but to talk about the
self-limitation of the state emphasizes the role of the
state as "an arena for much moral action and decision."[155]
It represents a move away from the ideal of a strictly
limited state.

A responsible, democratic state must have sufficient
power to carry out the moral decisions made for society
acting as a whole. The primary decision rule for
democratic governing is majority rule. These themes
within Wogaman's normative democratic theory are clearly
majoritarian. Furthermore, he argues that Christian
persons, along with all citizens, are responsible to the
outcome of political processes in which they have
participated as citizens.[156]

Wogaman's normative conception of democracy, with
its emphasis on participation, on decision making, and on
the democratic state as a potentially positive moral actor
in need of sufficient power to fulfill that role, has a
strong majoritarian cast to it. I would argue that the
majoritarian elements in this conception of political
democracy are the more prominent ones, but that Wogaman
has sufficient moral sensitivity to recognize the

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[155]Wogaman, <u>Religious Liberty</u>, 162.

[156]Wogaman, <u>Moral Judgement</u>, 146.

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legitimate moral concerns represented in more minoritarian
models of democracy. The relationship between major-
itarian and minoritarian concerns is not adequately
handled, however. Like some of the democratic theorists
discussed in chapter I, Wogaman recognizes important moral
concerns in both majoritarian and minoritarian models of
democracy. He wants his normative conception of democracy
to include elements of both models. Like those theorists,
however, Wogaman has not adequately related the different
normative principles which animate the two models of
democracy. His normative conception of democracy puts oil
and vinegar together without developing a coherent
dressing. The problem of a rather loose coherence within
Wogaman's conception of democracy has roots in his basic
ethical position and method.

Assessing Wogaman's Presumption for Democracy

Wogaman's ethic ought to be appreciated for its
thoroughness. He offers a wide-ranging position beginning
with a highly developed and insightful basic Christian
theological-ethical position and continues through to a
wide-ranging political ethic with its consideration of
democracy.   .

Wogaman's basic theological ethic considers most of
the significant issues in Christian ethics. He considers
the very nature of religion and its relation to reality.
He seeks an effective method for translating theological

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positions into moral principles. He proposes a method for
Christian moral judgement. While Wogaman covers a lot of
ground, some of the issues he addresses here are
inadequately characterized, handled or resolved.

Wogaman characterizes theological entry points as
primarily metaphoric in nature. While theological ideas
have an important metaphoric quality, and while
imagination plays an important role in ethical reflection,
theological positions are not simply metaphoric. They
ought to be developed conceptually. Such conceptual
development is often aided by the use of philosophical
positions. Wogaman slights this aspect of theological
thought. He utilizes a number of "conversation partners"
in developing his ethic, e.g., resources from the social
and political sciences. He might have made more extensive
use of the philosophical thought within which his disser-
tation advisor, Walter Muelder, was steeped. This is one
way of thinking more deeply about theological ethics.

Wogaman's idea of moral presumptions also raises an
issue of significance. In detailing various presumptions,
he seems content to speak more frequently of moral
principles, e.g., presumptions for freedom, equality or
justice. He does not seem as interested in developing
more specific moral rules out of these principles, yet the
idea of a presumption for certain courses of action is
equally applicable at the level of such rules, and might

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be more helpful as a method for guiding moral action if developed at that level. Thinking about moral principles is a valuable part of ethical reflection, but it does not preclude developing some concept of moral rules. Reflecting on the types of moral rules which could be generated from various presumptive principles might have helped Wogaman develop his democratic theory more adequately. A normative presumption for freedom might generate moral rules which fit more comfortably within minoritarian democracy. A normative presumption for equality might generate moral rules which fit more comfortably within majoritarian democracy. This potential clash of rules might have moved Wogaman to think more deeply. Wogaman does develop moral-rule thinking in certain cases, such as his consideration of just war criteria, but his ethic needs more work in this area.[157]

If developing the moral rules aspect of this ethic, would make it more adequate for guiding Christian moral judgement, so too, would a more thoroughgoing development of the notion that one might develop presumptions regarding the priority of some moral presumptions over others. Wogaman offers a distinction between higher or intrinsic presumptions and lower or instrumental ones, with the higher presumptions having priority over the lower. Elsewhere, he argues for the need to prioritize

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[157]Wogaman, <u>Perspectives</u>, 266-269.

values.[158] However, Wogaman never offers any developed

reflection on which values have priority and why.

Finally, we need to raise a question about Wogaman's

use of theological entry points as grounds for his moral

presumptions. Wogaman is often insightful as he attempts

to use theological positions in grounding moral

presumptions. His discussion of the way in which covenant

mutuality in relationships requires some substantive

concept of human equality is an example of his

insightfulness. However, Wogaman sometimes picks and

chooses among various entry points in developing various

moral norms. This leaves us wondering, at times, where

the consistent threads are in his ethic. Wogaman might

have spent more time interpreting his theological entry

points together, for instance interpreting human sin in

terms of human community and covenant.

As we turn our attention from Wogaman's basic

ethical position to his more strictly political ethic we

again acknowledge that he identifies most of the signif-

icant issues which a Christian political ethic ought to

address. He often develops his own thinking about these

issues with conceptual clarity and insight. Wogaman's

development of the concepts of the state, of politics and

of government are examples of such clarity and insight.

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[158]Wogaman, Moral Judgement, 71. Wogaman, Economics
and Ethics, 158.

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Unfortunately, such searching insight does not always characterize Wogaman's discussion of significant concepts. The concept of the common good does not get the attention it deserves considering Wogaman's assertion that it presents an overriding claim. The discussion of the moral principle of justice is also inadequate.

Wogaman never clearly indicates whether justice, or an ideal model such as the common good or the responsible society, will be the foundation for his political ethic. Nor does he bring his reflections on these matters together coherently. Justice involves claims, but which claims have priority? Might certain claims have priority in certain contexts, as Michael Walzer argues?[159] Justice involves claims, but also the adjudication of conflicting claims. Wogaman gives insufficient attention to this latter aspect of justice.

Even with these inadequacies, Wogaman's political ethic offers us a great deal. The general structure of his ethic is promising. We interpreted Wogaman's political ethic as being grounded in a vision for society, a vision of the Kingdom of God, of a society of mutual support and love. This vision is constructed out of various theological entry points taken together. An

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[159]Michael Walzer, Spheres of Justice (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

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overall normative vision links ultimate beliefs with normative political ethical models and principles.

This way of structuring a Christian political ethic deserves attention because, as political theorist Thomas Spragens contends, "the goal of political theory... is to provide a comprehensive vision of the political enterprise."[160] Within that comprehensive view, political theorists provide some conception of the good society.

> The imaginative reconstruction of the polis produced by the theorist's utopian vision intends to be a kind of truth about the world, about politics, and about man.... Without utopian speculation... human life would stagnate.[161]

This vision, which intends to reveal some truth about the human and about political life also provides norms for that political life.[162] Spragens' account of the importance of vision in political theory is compatible with Wogaman's analysis, and helps make a case for taking this visionary structure of political ethics seriously.

Along with providing the rudiments of a helpful structure for Christian political ethics, Wogaman offers a valuable contribution to that ethics in his idea of the penultimate reality of political-historical life. The idea that what happens within historical existence, while not ultimate in itself, nevertheless has significance to

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[160]Thomas A. Spragens, <u>Understanding Political Theory</u> (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 4.

[161]Ibid., 79-80.   [162]Ibid., 82.

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ultimate reality, captures an important dividing line within Christian political ethics. For Yoder, Hauerwas and others of like mind, political-historical effectiveness has little or no value in relation to what is ultimate. What matters to them is that the people of God live faithfully. The significance of such faithful existence for the ultimate achievement of God's purposes is not well defined. For Wogaman, historical achievements of justice, peace, equality and so on, are significant. They are part of the achievement of God's purpose for humankind. Wogaman's position seems the more adequate one, more adequate to biblical notions of the divine demand for human justice and more adequate to human experiences of caring for the world.

In another positive contribution, Wogaman rightly holds that in a democracy, processes of political and social dialogue should help define the content of political normative ideal models, such as the common good. Wogaman also rightly cautions that Christian support for political democracy needs to be joined with sensitivity to historical and cultural contexts.

Throughout this assessment of Wogaman's political-ethical thought, two criticisms arise again and again: 1) a certain lack of depth or development, and 2) a lack of integration or coherence. Wogaman's thought is underdeveloped on some important political-ethical themes.

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In being comprehensive in his Christian ethic, depth of
thought and insight is sometimes sacrificed. While
Wogaman provides some deep insight, he often lacks it and
might acknowledge when he feels he must cut his thinking
short in order to be comprehensive. Further, the
integration of various positions and principles in
Wogaman's ethic is not as sharp as we might like. When
moral presumptions do not fit neatly together, Wogaman
advises persons to probe more deeply. It might be that
more probing reflection would not provide greater
integration and coherence, but it ought to be attempted
before that conclusion is reached.

These two problems with Wogaman's theological-
ethical position plague his discussion of political
democracy. After Wogaman, it is difficult to see how an
adequate Christian normative conception of political
democracy can be simply either majoritarian or
minoritarian. The legitimate normative concerns which
characterize each model need to be included, but how
adequately they are brought together depends, in large
part, on the coherent and integrative character of the
underlying normative theory.

On this score, Wogaman seems simply to balance the
various concerns rather than relating them deeply. Such a
position makes prioritizing various normative concerns, or
delineating their appropriate place or function, more

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difficult. At some point we might conclude that such a balancing act, bringing oil and vinegar together without shaking them into a dressing, is the best we can do. Wogaman's thought does not convince us of that.

Developing this point further, Wogaman's view of the human as both social and individual also lacks final coherence. Each side of this duality can provide primary grounds for different moral norms, individuality grounding freedom and sociality grounding equality. Freedom and equality, in turn, serve as the primary normative concerns of minoritarian and majoritarian democracy, respectively. Can we understand human sociality and individuality together in a more integrated fashion? We might argue that individuality arises out of human social existence but becomes, in turn, necessary for the enrichment of social life. Such a position, more fully and adequately developed, might give greater priority to certain kinds of freedom while relegating other types to a lower normative status than normative concerns that the social world have a certain character. Wogaman's emphasis on rights to participation in socio-political life indicates that some of this kind of thinking lies just below the surface. Such integrative thinking needs more attention, including, perhaps more attention to metaphysical-ontological thinking. The ethics of Maritain and Sturm move in this direction.

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CHAPTER V

JACQUES MARITAIN:
NATURAL LAW, HUMANISM AND DEMOCRACY

A deep engagement with philosophical metaphysics characterizes the political ethic of Jacques Maritain. Maritain identifies himself as a "Thomist philosopher."[1] We use the category of "Christian natural law ethicist" to place Maritain in a context. The importance of the category of natural law in Thomistic ethics makes such a categorization rather unproblematic.

As a Thomist philosopher, rather than theologian proper, Maritain does not treat some important theological themes, at least in the social-ethical works we are considering. For instance, Maritain's ethical works offer little in the way of Christology. We begin our analysis of Maritain's thought with an exploration of his basic philosophical-theological views of God and the human. These conceptualizations, particularly his view of the human, ground his political-ethical thinking. In turn, Maritain's political ethic provides the necessary context within which to understand his conceptualization and

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[1]Jacques Maritian, <u>Reflections on America</u> (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 149.

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evaluation of political democracy. Accordingly, we will
move from an analysis of his basic philosophical-
theological stance to an analysis of his political ethic.
Then we examine his discussion of political democracy,
including the place he gives to majoritarian and
minoritarian concerns. We will conclude our examination
of Maritain's thought by offering some assessment of his
ethic and its potential for helping construct an adequate
normative conception of democracy.

Maritain's Views of God and the Human

In our discussion of Maritain's philosophical-
theological stance, we are limiting ourselves to exploring
his important works in social philosophy and political
ethics, from Integral Humanism to Man and the State.
Maritain develops his views of God and the human in these
works out of a conviction that such views are vitally
important to social philosophy. Morality is concerned
with the true human good, and this can only be determined
when one has adequately grasped the nature of the human.[2]
Furthermore, Maritain is convinced that one cannot
understand the human without reference to God.

Maritain's philosophical-theological view of the
human begins with the assumption that human persons share

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[2]Maritain, Man and the State (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1951), 55. Maritain, The Person and the
Common Good (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press,
1966. Originally published, 1944), 100-101.

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a common nature.[3] The crucial element in this common

human nature is found in the distinction between

"personality" and "individuality."[4] A human being is both

a person and an individual.

> The human soul, together with the matter which it
> informs, constitutes one substance, which is both
> carnal and spiritual.... Soul and matter are the two
> substantial co-principles of the same being, of one
> and the same reality, called man.[5]

Human individuality is rooted in the material side

of the human being. Human personality, in turn, has its

roots in the spiritual soul of the human being.[6] These

two aspects of being human are distinguishable but

inseparable.

> One and the same reality is, in a certain sense an
> individual, and, in another sense, a person. Our
> whole being is an individual by reason of that in us
> which derives from matter, and a person by reason of
> that in us which derives from spirit.[7]

Maritain's discussion of human nature includes this

distinction between the individual and the person,

elaboration of the meaning of each term, and discussion

about the human person considered as a unity. The fact

that he often uses the term "person" to refer to this

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[3]Maritain, _Man and State_, 85.

[4]Maritain, _The Rights of Man and Natural Law_ in
_Christianity and Democracy and The Rights of Man and
Natural Law_ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986.
Originally published 1943), 87. Maritian, _Person_, 11f.

[5]Maritain, _Person_, 36.   [6]Ibid., 36, 38.

[7]Ibid., 43.

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unity of individuality and personality can be confusing.
However, when we explore the meaning Maritain gives to
"individual" and "person," we are in a better position to
avoid such confusion.

Personality is the spiritual principle within the
human. Within the flesh and bone of the human being there
exists a spiritual soul. It is this aspect of the person
which is the image of God and is in direct relationship to
God.[8] Maritain describes this human soul, this image of
God within the human being, as "a principle of creative
unity, independence and liberty." The spiritual soul is a
whole which remains so by the operations of intellect,
freedom, knowledge and love. While personality, or the
spiritual soul, is the source of the unity of the human
being and the source of its interiority and subjectivity,
it is also that within us which makes us capable of giving
ourselves freely. The soul requires communications of
knowledge and love; it requires dialogue with others.[9]

This last set of assertions serves as one set of
reasons for viewing the human as social. The very nature
of the human pushes the human toward social life and
communion

> because of the radical generosity inscribed within the
> very being of the person, because of that openness to

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[8]Ibid., 41. Maritian, <u>Rights</u>, 89-90.

[9]Maritain, <u>Person</u>, 38, 40-42.

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the communications of intelligence and love which is the nature of the spirit and which demands an entrance into relationship with others.[10]

Maritain clearly differs with those who claim that human sociality is rooted simply in human deficiencies.[11] He provides a more positive base for viewing the human as social and political without neglecting the insights of the other position.

While personality grounds human sociality, it also provides a base for asserting human transcendence of every society. "The human person... transcends political society by reason of any and all absolute values to which the person is related."[12] Here Maritain uses "person" to refer to the unity of personality and individuality. However, personality is that aspect of the human person which is related to absolute values. "The taproot of human personality is not society, but God."[13] The end of the human person is union with God, a union which transcends society. The true human vocation is oriented to absolute values and to a destiny beyond time.[14]

Having discussed the central aspects of Maritain's understanding of human personality, we need to say a word

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[10]Maritain, _Rights_, 91.

[11]Maritain, _Person_, 47ff.

[12]Maritain, _Rights_, 152.

[13]Ibid., 103.

[14]Ibid., 103, 159.

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about human individuality. Human individuality is rooted

in matter, matter being "a kind of non-being, a mere

potency or ability to receive forms and undergo sub-

stantial mutations."[15] Soul provides the form for

material beings. Maritain maintains that this material

individuality is good as a necessary condition of our

existence. Nevertheless, evil arises when our actions

concede too much to material individuality. "Matter is

inclined to disintegration" and "material individuality is

inclined to fall."[16]

Human material individuality provides another reason

for human sociality.

> The human person is the person of a poor material
> individual, of an animal born more helpless than any
> other animal. Though the person as such is an
> independent whole and that which is noblest in all of
> nature, nonetheless the human person is at the lowest
> degree of personality - naked and miserable, indigent
> and full of wants. When it enters into society with
> its kind, therefore, it happens that, by reason of its
> deficiencies... the human person is present as part of
> a whole which is greater and better than its parts."[17]

This passage illustrates that Maritain does not

reject deficiency-based theories of human sociality. It

also ties together much of what we have said about the

distinction between personality and individuality.

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[15]Maritain, Person, 36.

[16]Ibid., 38, 43, 44.

[17]Ibid., 60.

Human beings, as individuals and persons, are "related first to God and then to the order and perfection of the created universe, of which they are the most noble and constitutive parts."[18] The ultimate human vocation is contemplation. Relationship to God and contemplative vocation serve as the ground of human dignity.[19] They are the roots of the transcendent value of human life. This solitary view of the human, needs to be balanced by Maritain's assertion that "the human person craves political life, communal life."[20]

Maritain talks about the human relation to God, about a vocation to contemplation, about the human craving for communal life. All of these characterize the essential task of being human, "that man must realize through his will that of which his nature is but a sketch." In other words, "man must become what he is." For Maritain, human action tends either in the direction of individuality or of personality. Further, "man will be truly a person only in so far as the life of the spirit and of liberty reigns over that of the senses and passions."[21] This essential human task has its socio-

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[18]Ibid., 17.

[19]Ibid., 28. Maritain, _Rights_, 88.

[20]Maritain, _Rights_, 92.

[21]Maritain, _Person_, 44-45.

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political side in the human aspiration toward a socio-
political emancipation which releases the human person
more and more from "the bonds of material nature."[22]

In describing Maritain's view of the essential human
task, we are introduced to his conceptions of sin and
evil. Human persons bear an "immense burden of animality,
of egoism and latent barbarism" which stands in the way of
persons and societies achieving their true aims.[23]
Without using the term, Maritain is giving us his view of
human sin. Here, as elsewhere, the roots of sin are in
human material individuality and in bodily existence.
However, Maritain also speaks about the potential
corruption of seemingly noble political ideas.[24] Does
such talk mitigate Maritain's location of human sin in
material individuality? The answer is unclear.
Furthermore, Maritain argues that "every great human
achievement is ambivalent, and that the best things
involve dangers or are accompanied by more or less serious
defects."[25] Do such dangers and defects arise from the
fact that human persons are material individuals or might
they be considered corruptions of the soul as well? We

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[22]Maritain, Rights, 117.

[23]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy (originaly
published, 1942), 50.

[24]Maritain, Man and the State, 141f.

[25]Maritain, Reflections, 17.

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return to such questions when we assess Maritain's thought. Whatever the potential defects of this attempt to locate sin in materiality we find a profound awareness of the presence of sin and evil in the world. At the same time human persons are called to struggle against and fight sin.[26]

For Maritain, the human cannot be understood without reference to God. One of the values of his work is its attempt at consistency and coherence. Having discussed God from the perspective of God's relationship to humankind, we ought to explore Maritain's view of the divine.

A number of terms are used to describe God, each providing a fresh angle of vision. For Maritain, God is "the divine, transcendent Whole." In this we see Maritain's location of God's image in human personality, for personality is a whole. God is also described as "the sovereign Personality whose existence itself consists in a pure and absolute super-existence by way of intellection and love." In another passage, Maritain calls God "the separated common Good of the universe." The ultimate common good is a society of blessed souls loving mutually in God.[27] Here we begin to move back toward the

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[26]Maritain, _Integral Humanism_, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner's, 1968), 191.

[27]Maritain, _Person_, 18, 40, 17, 23.

relationship between God, human persons, and human
societies.

Finally, as a way to move from Maritain's basic
theological-philosophical position to a discussion of his
political ethic, we note one other important feature of
his understanding of the divine-human relationship. For
Maritain, God is involved in the salvation of human
persons. Yet while God initiates all good, God also
provides for human freedom of action. God does not save
human persons without their cooperation, and this gives
human beings enormously important work to do.[28]

Maritain's Political Ethic

One could choose a variety of starting points for
discussing and analyzing Maritain's political ethic,
building on our analysis of his philosophical and
theological views, e.g. natural law, the state, or rights.
However, one gets an illuminating picture of this pol-
itical ethic by beginning with Maritain's conception of
the relationship between historical existence and the
realm of the ultimate common good. In our analysis of
Wogaman's Christian political ethic, we encountered the
idea that historical existence has penultimate value.
While achievements of justice and the common good are not
in themselves complete emobodiments of ultimate reality,

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[28]Maritain, Humanism, 11.

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they are nevertheless significant in relation to what is ultimately true and good. Put in terms of the eschato- logical reality of the Kingdom of God one can say that historical achievements of are not in themselves the Kingdom, but they contribute to it in some significant manner.

At times Maritain embraces the idea that historical existence has penultimate value. In a work written during World War II, a work more hortatory than scholarly, Maritain discusses the importance of vision for politics.

> The creation of a new world will not be the work of the war but of the force of vision and will and of the energies of intellectual and moral reform which will have developed in the collective conscience and in the responsible leaders.[29]

Full realization of the ideal of human community lies in the future, "but in the meantime we must act and fight and advance in the right direction."[30] Maritain asserts the importance of a vision of the ideal in directing human action, including action in the political realm.

We need to ask, however, what kind of relationship exists between a social ideal or vision and the ultimate common good of souls loving mutually in God. Here the waters get murky. On the one hand, Maritain argues the possibility for, and necessity of, Christianity animating

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[29]Maritian, _Christianity and Democracy_, 5.

[30]Ibid., 9.

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social and political life.[31] Constructing ideals for
historical existence is an important part of the process
of materializing gospel principles. Maritain is no naive
utopian and he recognizes that the realization of Gospel
principles within human history is always deficient. Yet
he enjoins Christian persons to strive for "proportionate
realization" of the Gospel principles within the socio-
temporal order.[32]

However, Maritain also makes a rather sharp
distinction between the temporal human community with its
human common good and the metaphysics of grace.[33] He
argues that in the course of Western history, the Gospel
distinction between the things that are Caesar's and the
things that are God's has come to the fore in a more
perfect distinction between the civil society and the
spiritual realm. "Civil society has come to be based on a
common good and a common task which are of an earthly,
'temporal,' or 'secular' order."[34] Elsewhere Maritain
writes,

> As regards the Kingdom of God and eternal life, it is
> the acceptance or refusal of religious dogma which

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[31]Maritain, Rights, 107-108.

[32]Maritain, Man and State, 55. Maritain, Humanism,
42, 108, 126.

[33]Maritain, Rights, 108.

[34]Maritain, The Range of Reason (New York:
Scribner's, 1952), 165.

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> constitutes the essential difference between human
> minds. As regards temporal life and the earthly
> community, it is the acceptance or refusal of the
> historic vocation of mankind.[35]

The way in which Maritain distinguishes the temporal and

spiritual realms in these passages argues against

interpreting his thinking as embracing a strong conception

of the penultimate value of historical existence.

To interpret Maritain's thought as containing a

rather sharp distinction between the spiritual and

temporal is in keeping with the interpretation of Maritain

offered by Gustavo Gutierrez. Gutierrez offers his

interpretation of Maritain in a discussion of varying

responses to the question of the relationship between

faith and temporal realities. He views Maritain's work as

an attempt to formulate ideas of, and principles for, "a

society inspired by Christian principles."[36] Yet

Maritain's thinking distinguishes rather sharply between

the temporal and the spiritual. These are viewed as two

distinct planes, each with its own importance. Gutierrez

argues that the distinction of planes model is inadequate

for Christian political thinking. He advocates a position

which emphasizes, "the unity of salvation," and he

expresses this in various ways. "The building of a just

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[35]Maritain, _Rights_, 116-117.

[36]Gustavo Gutierrez, _A Theology of Liberation_
(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973). 55.

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society has worth in terms of the Kingdom of God." "To particiapte in the process of liberation is already, in a certain sense, a salvific work."[37]

Gutierrez makes a compelling case for his view of Maritain, though much in Maritain's own work seems to struggle against a hard distinction between the temporal and the transcendent or spiritual. However, he never abandons that distinction.

Nevertheless, Maritain's political ethic retains vision as a central category. He writes about "a new Christendom," "integral humanism," and "the humanist conception of society."[38] These normative ideals are what Maritain calls "concrete historical ideals." Concrete historical ideals provide normative images of what might be expected within given social and historical conditions. They are relative applications of normative principles, relative to certain times and conditions, and potentially realizable within those conditions. Maritain concedes that their realization may contain more or less imperfection.[39] Yet the ideals retain great value.

Maritain assumes that human beings are not motivated simply by abstract moral principles, but by these

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[37]Ibid., 72.

[38]Maritain, Humanism, 6. Maritain, Rights, 121.

[39]Maritain, Man and State, 157. Maritain, Humanism, 128.

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principles as they are articulated within a comprehensive vision. He does not reject the hard and complicated work of shaping more specific policy recommendations, though he himself rarely ventures in that direction. He emphasizes that the work of articulating ideals is not simply a preface to providing more concrete and specific moral action guides. Rather, such work has an important function in moving people to think about and act upon those more specific moral action guides. "It suffices that such an ideal be possible for human energies to find therein an efficacious orientation for useful historical work."[40]

While these ideals and visions are inspired by the Gospel, though not derived directly from it, their more immediate source is natural law. Natural law gives direction for life within history. Natural law has, as its foundation, Eternal Law, which is nothing other than the wisdom of God.[41] Human rationality participates in this eternal reason, thus natural law can be know by human persons. The nature of human knowledge of natural law will be discussed below. In the meantime we will consider the character and content of natural law.

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[40]Maritain, Humanism, 211.

[41]Maritain, "Natural Law and Moral Law," in Four Existentialist Theologians, ed. Will Herberg (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1958), 84-85.

Maritain argues that natural law follows from "the simple fact that man is man." It has to do with "the normality of functioning of the human being."[42] Giving us a slightly different angle, Maritain writes

> there is, by the very virtue of human nature, an order or a disposition which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act in order to attune itself to the essential and necessary ends of the human being.[43]

For Maritain, natural law is thus moral law. All human persons know infallibly "as a self-evident principle" that one ought to do good and avoid evil. "Natural law deals with the rights and the duties which are connected in a necessary manner with the first principle: do good and avoid evil."[44] Beyond that minimum, knowledge of the remaining content of the natural law does not come so readily. "Men know it with greater or less difficulty, and in different degrees, running the risk of error here as elsewhere."[45] We first come to know natural law in the form of knowledge by inclination, that is by self-reflection on our moral and social experience. Only then does the work of conceptualization begin.[46] This

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[42]Maritain, _Rights_, 148. Maritain, "Natural Law," 81.

[43]Maritain, _Man and State_, 86.

[44]Maritain, "Natural Law," 81. Maritain, _Man and State_, 90, 97-98.

[45]Maritain, _Man and State_, 90-91.

[46]Ibid., 90-91. Maritain, "Natural Law," 82.

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moral epistemology allows Maritain to account for the historical differences in conceptions of natural law and human rights.

"The philosophical foundation of the rights of man is natural law." In other words, Maritain grounds and justifies the existence of certain rights by appeal to natural law.[47] Natural law not only requires respect for rights, but also requires relations of authority in society.[48] Natural law can be a source for a democratic creed, as well. Rights, authority, and the idea of a democratic creed will all be discussed later in this chapter. That Maritain's conception of rights, democracy and historical ideals all have their roots in natural law is an indication of the importance of natural law in his ethic.

Maritain's historical ideals such as "integral humanism" or the "humanist conception of society" are rooted in natural law. They are given content in his discussions of the common good and of human rights. Maritain's political ethic is concerned with the temporal common good, the conception of which is inspired by his understanding of the supernatural common good, but is applicable within the temporal plane to human political

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[47]Maritain, Man and State, 80, 95, 100.

[48]Maritain, Scholasticism and Politics (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 103ff.

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life. The temporal common good provides a foundation for concrete historical ideals. Any adequate concrete historical ideal must be decisively shaped by an understanding of the temporal common good. Maritain describes the temporal common good as an ultimate end in a relative sphere. It can be realized only approximately.[49] While the temporal common good (hereafter referred to simply as "the common good") is ultimate only in its relative sphere, it nevertheless contains "supra-human values" and is thus indirectly related to the ultimate end of humankind.[50] Once again, Maritian strains against a sharp distinction between the temporal and spiritual planes.

Having discussed the abstract characteristics of the common good, we need to give it more content. The common good is not "the mere collection of private goods," but is rather "the good human life of the multitude... their communion in good living."[51] This good human life includes respecting human persons, establishing justice, fostering fraternal love, and developing virtues within persons.[52] The task of a society oriented to the common good is to better the conditions of human life. This

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[49]Maritain, Person, 64. Maritain, Rights, 129.

[50]Maritain, Person, 69.

[51]Ibid., 51.

[52]Maritain, Humanism, 217. Maritain, Rights, 96.

includes, "the economic guarantees of work and property, political rights, civil virtues, and the cultivation of the life of the mind."[53] The common good includes the collection of public commodities and services, just laws, sound fiscal and military policy, wise institutions. "The political work par excellence is that of rendering common life better."[54] It is the work of struggling for the common good.

Within this conception of the common good lies what might be called an essential tension, a dialectic, if you will. On the one hand, the temporal common good is "indirectly subordinate" to the human person in that the ultimate end of the human person transcends every society.[55] The common good is intended to serve persons and to "flow back upon persons." The common good "includes, as its principal value, the access of persons to their liberty of expansion." On the other hand, Maritain characterizes the common good as superior to private goods.[56]

This dialectic within Maritain's conception of the

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[53]Maritain, Man and State, 54.

[54]Maritain, Person, 52. Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 46.

[55]Maritain, Rights, 98.

[56]Maritain, Person, 29, 55, 60-61.

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common good derives directly from his view of the human.[57] The human as individual is part of the social whole, while the human as person has an inner wholeness. Human society is both a society of individuals and a society of persons, but as persons, humans transcend every historical society in relation to their ultimate destiny in God. Recall, though, that even as persons, humans need social relationships for the full development of their capacities and for the winning of their freedom.[58] Maritain's conception of freedom parallels one offered by another natural law political ethicist, John Hallowell. We cite Hallowell's definition for its clarity as compared with some of Maritain's statements. "Freedom consists not in the pursuit of pleasure but in a disciplined, ordered life directed to the perfection of that which is distinctively human."[59]

With this dialectic, Maritain wants to avoid both the individualism of classical liberalism and the collect-

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[57]Ralph McInnerny, "The Primacy of the Common Good," in The Common Good and U.S. Captialism, ed. Williams and Houck. 70-83. McInnerny provides an interesting discussion of the historical context within which Maritain formulated his conception of the common good and of the human as person and individual.

[58]Maritain, Person, 44. Maritain, Scholasticism, 135-137.

[59]John Hallowell, The Moral Foundation of Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 131. Compare Maritain, Scholasticism, Ch. 5.

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ivism of totalitarianism. He also wants to avoid a mere trade-off between personal and communal needs and aspirations.[60] Maritain wants his conception of the common good to provide a way for prioritizing and evaluating the varying demands for social commitment and the varying demands of persons for free spaces. By linking his conception of the common good to his teleological view of the human, Maritain indicates that each demand for social commitment or for free space must be evaluated in terms of the contributions each makes to the human task of becoming what we essentially are. Maritain's discussion of rights, which can be construed as a further elaboration upon his view of the common good, reinforces the view that he wants to integrate personal and communal claims in a socio-political ethic which gives us some direction for deciding between them.

The common good "implies and demands the recognition of the fundamental rights of the person." "Human rights have an intrinsic relation to the common good."[61] Again, these are rather abstract characterizations of rights. The substantive content of Maritain's conception of rights is found in his enumeration of the various kinds of rights. In the most complete list of various rights, he

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[60]Maritain, _Rights_, 93-94. Maritain, _Person_, 65.

[61]Maritain, _Rights_, 94. Maritain, _Man and State_, 101.

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divides them into rights of the person as such, rights of the civic person, and rights of the social person.[62] Among the rights of persons as such are: the right to existence, the right to personal liberty and the responsibility for its exercise before God and the law, rights to the pursuit of perfection and eternal life, the rights of religious organizations, rights of family life, the right to property, and the right of every human being to be treated as a person. Among the rights of the civic person are: the rights of citizens to participate actively in political life, the right of equal suffrage, the right of a people to establish a State and its constitution, the right of association including the right to establish political parties, the rights of investigation and discussion, and political equality. Finally, among the rights of the social person are: the right to choose a vocation, the right to form unions and vocational groups, the right to a just wage, the right to work, rights to various social securities such as unemployment and health benefits, and the right to have a part in the elementary material and spiritual goods of civilization.

Maritain understands each of these rights to have its ground in human nature and thus in natural law. As such, society does not grant these rights, but ought to

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[62]Maritain, Rights, 187-189.

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recognize them.[63] Even though the task of society is to
recognize these rights, Maritain understands that such
recognition occurs within history. He argues that the
recognition of "new rights" often occurs in contention
with already recognized rights. Furthermore, societies
are in danger of overemphasizing certain rights at the
expense of others.[64] Maritain's point is not merely
historical. It represents his view that rights must be
understood together.

In seeking to understand the whole range of rights
together, Maritain sees various ways in which rights might
be limited. Logically prior to this idea, however, is
Maritain's distinction between the possession and the
exercise of rights. Our possession of rights may not be
limited though there may be legitimate limitations placed
upon the exercise of our rights. Maritain sees three
types of circumstances in which rights might be limited.
He argues that certain rights might be limited by
consideration of the common good, e.g. rights of free
speech or association. This may strike some as puzzling
given Maritain's previous insistence that the common good
requires recognition of human rights. Here the
distinction between possession and exercise comes into

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[63]Maritain, Man and State, 101, 96.

[64]Ibid., 103.

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play. Recognizing that persons have rights does not mean that every exercise of these rights is consistent with the human nature out of which they arise or with the good human life which they are intended to serve. The common good, concerned with the good human life, can provide a legitimate reason for limiting the exercise of rights. The way in which rights are limited is another issue. Certain types of association may be so destructive of the fabric of a community that they might legitimately be limited. The exercise of human rights might also be limited by considerations of justice.[65] Maritain uses the example of limiting the rights of persons convicted of crimes. Finally, he asserts that rights are mutually limiting.

> That the various rights ascribed to the human being
> limit each other, particularly that the economic and
> social rights, the rights of man as a person involved
> in the life of the community, cannot be given room in
> human history without restricting, to some extent, the
> freedoms and rights of man as an individual person, is
> only normal.[66]

In our discussion of Maritain's conception of the common good we asserted that he views the common good not simply as an overarching normative principle within which a variety of normative concerns could be held in tension, but also as a normative concept which could help order other normative principles and concerns. Our analysis

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[65]Ibid., 101-102.

[66]Ibid., 106.

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of his view of rights reinforces the idea that Maritain

wants the common good to serve such a function. We find

this most clearly stated in Man and the State.

> Everything depends upon the supreme value in
> accordance with which all these rights will be ordered
> and will mutually limit each other.... The advocates
> of a personalistic type of society see the mark of
> human dignity first and foremost in the power to make
> these same goods of nature serve the common conquest
> of intrinsically human, moral and spiritual goods and
> of man's freedom of autonomy.[67]

What is Maritain's conception of the common good but

this conception of the development of the human, moral and

spiritual capacities of persons? The content of the

common good is provided, to a great extent, by rights,

rights viewed together. What Maritain is trying to

achieve with this concept of mutually limiting rights can

be conceived of in terms of a "recipe" for human

flourishing, a recipe for the common good. Terry Pinkard

distinguishes two methods for balancing principles and

goods, a compromise balance and a recipe balance.[68] A

compromise balance is appropriate when having more of one

good means having less of another. One could purchase two

books or three CDs, but does not have the money to buy all

these things. The appropriate way to proceed would be to

come up with some compromise, though ideally one would

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[67]Ibid., 106-107.

[68]Terry Pinkard, Democratic Liberalism and Social
Union (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 130-
136. See also our Ch. VIII.

like to buy all the items. With a recipe balance, one balances various ingredients to achieve a desired result. The desirable amount of any one ingredient, of any one good, would be determined by its contribution to the end result. In baking a cake, one does not try to use as much flour as is available. Pinkard argues that the idea of a recipe balance fits well in political ethics, the idea "of adjusting the mix of principles so that the good society is achieved."[69] Maritain constructs a recipe for the common good.

Ethical principles and ideals become operative within the histories of persons and societies. To understand Maritain's political ethic we need to explore his understandings of political society and the state. The common good and human rights provide moral norms for these associations. At this point, let us remind ourselves that "the person requires membership in society in virtue of both its dignity and its needs."[70] All social life involves bringing persons together around a common object. A society is a particular type of human association. "In a society the [common] object is a task to be done or an end to be aimed at, which depends on the determinations of human intelligence and will."[71]

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[69]Ibid., 134.

[70]Maritain, Person, 47.

[71]Maritain, Man and State, 3.

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"Political society", or "the body politic," represents one particular kind of society.

> Political society, required by nature and achieved by reason, is the most perfect of temporal societies. It is a concretely and wholly human reality, tending to a concretely and wholly human good - the common good.[72]

The political task, as we discussed it, is thus the task of the political society.[73] Political society is inspired by, and called to embody within its historical life, the humanist conception of society, insofar as this is possible. In one discussion of this ideal, Maritain introduces two other normative concepts which play a role in his political ethic. A truly humanist conception of society "recognizes justice and civic friendship as the essential foundations of that community of human persons which is political society."[74]

The task of achieving the common good, of recognizing human rights, of embodying justice and civic friendship is the work of political society. Nevertheless, Maritain emphasizes that society so oriented becomes perverted if it fails to "contribute to the development and improvement of human persons." On the other hand, the political task, while contributing toward the development

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[72]Ibid., 10.

[73]Ibid., 55. Maritain, _Rights_, 126.

[74]Maritain, _Rights_, 121.

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of human persons, can never be viewed simply as an
aggregate of individual goods.[75]

This dialectic, which again has its roots in
Maritain's view of the human, emerges analogously in his
conception of society as an organic unity of diverse
social groups and in the normative principles related to
this conception.[76]

> According to the pluralist principle, everything in
> the body politic which can be brought about by
> particular organs or societies inferior in degree to
> the state and born out of the free initiative of the
> people should be brought about by those particular
> organs or societies; [and] vital energy should
> unendingly rise from the people within the body
> politic.[77]

Here we have Maritain's conception of the principle of
subsidiarity. This is linked with his idea of the
development of human persons. Such development "normally
requires a plurality of autonomous communities which have
their own rights, liberties and authority."[78]

Thus it would seem that political society takes
advantage of group pluralism as it works toward its aim.
However, pluralism is potentially problematic. This
helps account for Maritain's view that force has a

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[75]Ibid., 92, 93. Maritain, Man and State, 54.

[76]Maritain, Humanism, 163-164. Maritain, Man and State, 67.

[77]Maritain, Man and State, 67-68.

[78]Maritain, Rights, 105.

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necessary role to play within political societies.[79] The

introduction of the concept of force provides an entry

point into Maritain's conception of the state.

Maritain views the state as a set of institutions

which are part of political society.

> The State is only that part of the body politic
> especially concerned with the maintenance of law, the
> promotion of the common welfare and public order, and
> the administration of public affairs. The State is a
> part which specializes in the interests of the
> whole.[80]

Maritain describes his theory of the state as

"instrumentalist." The state exists to serve the pol-

itical society in its function as the highest authority

within any political society.[81] He argues that the

existence of the state is demanded given the requirements

of human nature, and thus of natural law.

> If... human nature can be preserved and developed only
> within a state of culture, and if the state of culture
> necessarily entails the existence in the social group
> of a function of commandment and government directed
> to the common good, then this function is demanded by
> natural law, and implies a right to command and
> govern.[82]

Maritain defines "authority" as the right to command and

govern. The state possesses the highest authority within

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[79]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 51.

[80]Maritain, Man and State, 12.

[81]Ibid., 13.

[82]Ibid., 126.

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the political society. It ought to use that authority in service of the common good of the political society.[83]

Political society requires the presence of the state. This assumes that the free functioning of the plural groups in any society would not, by itself, achieve the common good. Some set of institutions needs to concern itself with the good of the whole. The state is just that set of institutions, and it possesses its authority by virtue of its concern with the common good of the political society. Authority, however, needs power for accomplishing its legitimate goals, power being "the force by means of which you can oblige others to obey you."[84] For Maritain, then, the state has recourse to "power and coercion" in exercising its authority. He argues that "coercion will always have its part to play in human societies."[85] However, all power ought to be an expression of authority. Beyond this analysis Maritain does not develop his notions of power and coercion.

While Maritain understands the state as necessary and important, he is also concerned about the possibility that the state will move beyond its legitimate limits. States have a tendency to consider their own existence as

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[83]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 58.

[84]Maritain, Man and State, 126.

[85]Ibid., 13. Maritain, Rights, 116.

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an end, and not merely as a means. Those who are con-
cerned for the whole are tempted to mistake themselves for
the whole. For Maritain, states need to be accountable
to, and controlled by, the political societies which they
serve. The state, after all, receives its authority to
govern the body politic from the very political society
which it governs and serves. Maritain argues that a
constitutional state is most compatible with this
normative conception of the state.[86]

The state exists to serve the common good and should
exercise its power and authority to that end.[87] Maritain
suggests some specific ways that the state serves the
common good. The laws which a state passes certainly have
a coercive power which ought to function for the common
good. Yet he argues that laws also serve the common good
because of their capacity to educate the people and aid in
the development of moral virtues. Beyond formulating and
enforcing laws, the state serves the common good by
coordinating, controlling and directing the economic
order.[88] Maritain does not want to obliterate the

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[86]Maritain, <u>Man and State</u>, 14, 42, 24. Maritain,
<u>Rights</u>, 165.

[87]Yves Simon, <u>Philosophy of Democratic Government</u>
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) provides a
more extensive analysis of these ideas from a
complimentary perspective.

[88]Maritain, <u>Rights</u>, 156, 178-179.

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distinction between the economic and political spheres, nor to mitigate his insistence on social pluralism, only to assert the authority of the political over the economic.

Maritain's moral vision of the human good and the good society has the common good at its core. The common good is the common good of political societies, and within those societies, the state functions as the highest authority and its proper concern is for the common good. A society compatible with the ideal of the common good is one in which social structures "have as their measure justice, the dignity of the human person, and fraternal love."[89] The idea of human dignity is well-developed in Maritain's ethic, and we have discussed it extensively. However, his conceptions of "justice," and "fraternal love" or "civic friendship" are rather undeveloped.

With regard to justice, the general statements Maritain makes about it imply that justice is self-defining. Maritain asserts that justice is necessary for common life, and that it is a primary need of the human community. Justice is a primary condition for the existence of political society and the first condition of good politics. Justice fosters order.[90] With all these

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[89]Maritain, Humanism, 111.

[90]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 38, 42f. Maritain, Man and State, 211, 10, 58.

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accolades, you would think Maritain would work more at defining justice. To our disappointment, he does not.

The same might be said of "civic friendship." Maritain calls it the soul of political society and its life-giving form. However, about all he does to characterize civic friendship is to say that it is rooted in justice.[91] Both justice and civic friendship, in turn, depend upon a sense of human equality. For Maritain, the sense of human equality required for justice and civic friendship does not exclude all differentiation and inequality, though just what it includes remains undefined.[92]

Justice, civic friendship and equality all have roles to play in Maritain's recipe for the common good, for the good human society. Their respective roles remain unclear, however, because the concepts themselves remain underdeveloped. The whole recipe for the good human society, that is, Maritain's political ethic, serves as the necessary context for understanding his conception of political democracy.

Integral Humanist Democracy

The primary focus of Maritain's discussion of democracy is on democracy as a normative ideal, as

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[91]Maritain, Man and State, 209. Maritain, Rights, 118-119. Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 44-45.

[92]Maritain, Rights, 119.

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a concrete historical ideal. He has little to say about existing political democracies except that they ought to express more adequately the democratic ideals and principles which helped bring them into being.[93] Our discussion of Maritain's conception of, and judgements about, democracy will be in three parts. We will begin with his characterization of the democratic ideal. We then move to a consideration of the character of political democracies rooted in this ideal. Finally we engage in an archaeology of Maritain's democratic theory in an attempt to discern how it incorporates majoritarian and minoritarian elements explicitly and implicitly.

For Maritain, democracy, above all, should be considered "a general philosophy of human and political life and a state of mind." As such, democracy remains compatible with a variety of political forms, from monarchy to political democracy. Nevertheless, the dynamic of democratic thought presses towards its realization in democratic political regimes.[94]

The democratic ideal as a general philosophy of human and political life, Maritain labels "integrally human democracy," "organic democracy," and "personalist

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[93]Maritain, Scholasticism, 100. Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 61.

[94]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 25. Maritain, Man and State, 129.

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democracy."[95] This ideal has evangelical roots. It is inspired by the Gospel.

> The important thing for the political life of the world... is by no means to pretend that Christianity is linked to democracy and that Christian faith compels every believer to be a democrat; it is to affirm that democracy is linked to Christianity and that the democratic impulse has arisen in human history as a temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel.[96]

For Maritain, concrete democracies will never fully realize the Gospel-inspired ideal. Furthermore, their progress in approximately realizing the ideal requires the inspiration of the Gospel. Such inspiration is necessary to retain a vital democratic state of mind. This state of mind includes: respect for and faith in human dignity, in human rights and justice; sustaining a sense of equality; respect for authority and law combined with a knowledge that authority arises from the people; and faith in liberty and fraternity.[97] These attitudes and principles form what Maritain calls, variously, "the democratic charter," "the democratic secular faith," or "the democratic creed." The attitudes and principles which form this charter are considered matters for practical

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[95]Maritain, _Christianity and Democracy_, 23. Maritain, _Scholasticism_, 99-100. Maritain, _Man and State_, 109.

[96]Maritain, _Christianity and Democracy_, 28-29, 20. Maritain, _Rights_, 133.

[97]Maritain, _Christianity and Democracy_, 48-49.

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agreement, which persons can justify from a variety of philosophical perspectives.[98]

Integrally human democracy, besides being an ideal to be cultivated within the consciousness of persons and societies also serves as an ideal for the organization of political societies and states. The normative principles which are part of the democratic state of mind have implications for political life. Maritain argues that political democracy provides for the moral rationalization of political life, by which he means an unending effort to recognize the truly human ends of political society by shaping the structures of that society so they serve the common good, justice and friendship. Political democracy provides for the moral rationalization of political life by being "a rational organization of freedoms founded upon law." The end of democracy is justice and freedom, and the means it uses to achieve such ends must be compatible with them.[99]

In considering the means appropriate to the ends of political democracy, Maritain embarks on a discussion of the way political life ought to be organized in response to the ideal of integrally humanist democracy. Here we find Maritain's focus on political democracy proper. The

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[98]Maritain, Range, 166-167. Maritain, Man and State, 108-126.

[99]Maritain, Man and State, 59-60.

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discussion remains rather general, though we are now
operating at a level of moral discourse closer to actual
political practice.

The normative principles of integrally humanist
democracy find their most adequate expression in a
constitutional, republican government.[100] In a democratic
state, which Maritain views as synonymous with a
constitutional and republican government, "the control of
the people over the state... is inscribed in the prin-
ciples and constitutional fabric of the body politic."[101]
A democratic government is best defined, for Maritain, as
government of, by and for the people.[102] Maritain
identifies a number of features of such a government. The
people within a political democracy have regular, stat-
utory means by which to exercise their control, e.g.
periodically choosing their representatives. They will
also have the means to express public opinion. A
democratic regime includes means outside of governmental
agencies for the people to put pressure on their governing
officials.[103]

On the idea of political representation, Maritain

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[100]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 59.

[101]Maritain, Man and State, 65.

[102]Maritian, Reflections, 168. Maritain, Man and
State, 25. Maritain, Scholasticism, 107.

[103]Maritain, Man and State, 65-66.

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has much to say. One method people use to control the state is by choosing those who will serve within it, their representatives. The right to vote is fundamental.[104] Those positions on which people vote are positions of authority. Representatives are rulers within political democracies; they are vested with authority, with the right to command. They exercise this authority with the people and on their behalf. The authority by which representatives govern, and the power they use to govern, is conferred on them by the people.[105] Representatives also function as educators. "To rule in communion with the people means on the one hand educating and awakening the people in the very process of governing them."[106] In short, while ultimate political authority rests with the body politic, final authority for formulating laws and policies rests with the state and the representatives of the people who operate its institutions. Such policy-making ought to occur in dialogue with the considered judgement of the people. "The political life of the state must express the thought and the will of the citizen, with regard to the common good and to the common task."[107]

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[104]Maritain, _Rights_, 163.

[105]Maritain, _Man and State_, 134, 136, 47. Maritain, _Scholasticism_, 100.

[106]Maritain, _Man and State_, 137.

[107]Maritain, _Rights_, 163.

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Maritain's theory of constitutional, republican government, particularly his view of representation, implies elements of political life which are beyond governmental politics. Politics weaves its way into broader public life. For Maritain, elections do not provide a sufficient means for the real and active political participation of democratic citizens. Furthermore, active participation in the life of a political community is a privilege proper to human nature.[108] What might fill the void left by the inadequate participation offered in electoral politics? Maritain has said that representatives need to be informed by the people. In addition, he argues that freedom of speech and expression, of investigation and discussion, are necessary for the general dissemination of truth and goodness throughout society. No community of free persons can exist without freedom of discussion, which entails the right of dissent.[109] Maritain, thus seems to view discussion of pressing socio-political issues as a primary form for continuing political participation.

While emphasizing the importance of political discussion, Maritain also acknowledges some of its limits.

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[108]Maritain, __Man and State__, 66. Maritain, __Rights__, 162-163.

[109]Maritain, __Rights__, 162-163. Maritain, __Reflections__, 38.

People do not decide what is just. Neither a majority,

nor the State, can serve as the standard of conscience.

Nevertheless, political discussion retains immense value.

Wisdom can be found in the common person and within the

national community.[110] Citizens must exercise their

considered judgement "on every matter pertaining to the

political common good." "The first axiom and precept in

democracy is to trust the people."[111]

Political life in democracies, beyond government,

should be characterized by participation, discussion,

dialogue. It is also a life characterized positively by

pluralism. We have already discussed Maritain's view of

subsidiarity and the need for autonomous associations.[112]

Among the autonomous associations that have a positive

role to play in political society are political parties.

> Because of the very fact that every person as such
> should normally be able to make his thought and his
> will felt in political matters, it is also normal for
> the members of political society to group themselves,
> according to the affinity of their ideas and aspira-
> tions, into political parties or political schools.[113]

While political parties have not always been a positive

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[110]Maritain, Christianity and Democracy, 39, 67.
Maritain, Rights, 156. Maritain, Man and State, 11.

[111]Maritain, Man and State, 164, 143.

[112]Ibid., 67, 11. Maritain, Rights, 166. Maritain,
Christianity and Democracy, 58.

[113]Maritain, Rights, 163-164.

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force in politics, they nevertheless have an important role to play.[114]

What do all these elements of the democratic ideal and the ideal of democratic society tell us about Maritain's view of majoritarian and minoritarian elements within normative democratic theory? On the face of it, an integrally humanist democratic polity tries to hold together majoritarian and minoritarian concerns. This judgement seems confirmed by the few explicit comments he makes about such issues.

Maritain argues that popular majorities have a definite role to play in shaping the laws of the political society, in dialogue with governing representatives.[115] This represents a mildly positive view of majoritarian democracy. In keeping with this positive view, Maritain is critical of the position that the function of society is to "ensure the material convenience of scattered individuals, each absorbed in his own well-being and in enriching himself."[116] "The end of society... is neither the individual good nor the collection of the individual goods of each of the persons who constitute it."[117]

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[114]Ibid., 164. Maritain, Scholasticism, 114.

[115]Maritain, Man and State, 112.

[116]Ibid., 54.

[117]Maritain, Person, 49-50.

Minoritarian democrats usually assert some form of these positions which Maritain criticizes. Finally, Maritain's positive view of majoritarianism can be seen in his insistence that the state must protect the people as a whole against privileged groups and classes.[118]

While we have discovered some points of positive regard for majoritarian democracy within Maritain's thought, we can also discover a positive place for minoritarian concerns. Maritain's positive view of associational pluralism requires the protection of political minorities. Maritain argues that the views of political minorities are often prophetic. Democracies need "prophetic shock-minorities" as they often provide a spearhead for needed changes in political society.[119]

Maritain's normative theory of democracy does not lend itself either to simple majoritarian or minoritarian models. Maritain's metaphysics of the person-individual can support elements of both models of democracy. The human being as person seems to fit more with minoritarian conceptions of democracy. Yet one might also argue that positive governemnt action, a theme which tends to be found more often in majoritarian democracy, is needed in order for society to grant recognition to the full

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[118]Maritain, Man and State, 26.

[119]Ibid., 139ff.

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personhood of all its members. The human being as
individual seems to fit more with majoritarian conceptions
of democracy. Yet one could argue that some governing
elite is best suited to keep the whole of society running
properly, and thus those elites need protection against a
majority run amok. At the very least, Maritain's
political ethic highlights the importance of such deep
issues for Christian political ethics. In assessing
Maritain's thought we need to ask about the adequacy of
his metaphysics, as well as the adequacy of his conception
of democracy. We will also explore more deeply the
potential contribution of Maritain's thought to the
formation of an adequate normative conception of
democracy.

Assessing Maritain's Political Ethic

We are in debt to Maritain for the way he engages
deep theological and philosophical issues in constructing
his political ethic. We can agree with political theorist
William Bluhm that Maritain's "theological politics" makes
a real contribution to political theory in its use and
defense of metaphysical analysis.[120]

In contrast to Wogaman, Maritain gives a great deal
of thought to his metaphysical position as a context for
his political ethic. On the issue of the importance of

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[120]William T. Bluhm, Theories of the Political
System (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 221.

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vision in political ethics, however, the two are close to each other. Our overarching moral ideals and principles determine our more concrete moral action guides and standards of character. Of course, the experiences of those trying to live in accord with these action guides and standards ought to shape our understanding and formulation of the guides and standards, as well as our understanding and formulation of our moral ideals and our theological and philosophical positions. This is a genuine insight of liberation theologies.

Beyond the help given to us by Maritain's use of metaphysics and of the idea of vision, the way he thinks about the nature of moral vision and more concrete historical norms is also helpful. Here again, we introduced another idea to help draw out Maritain's own thinking, the idea of a recipe. Maritain seems to be after a recipe for the good human life of the multitude when he constructs his conception of the common good. In all these ways, he helps us think about an adequate structure for Christian political ethics.

In addition to the insight given about the structure of a Christian political ethic, Maritain's thinking about an adequate normative conception of democracy also has much to offer. His conception of democracy does not fit comfortably within either a majoritarian or minoritarian category. Normative democracy includes elements of both.

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On the majoritarian side, Maritain gives a significant

place to majorities in decision-making. He argues the

need for state action and emphasizes the importance of

political participation. On the minoritarian side,

Maritain lays great stress on the importance of social

pluralism, particularly in light of the fact that minority

groups often have essential insights into changes needed

in society. He also argues the need for a limited state

and for a notion of politics that is more than government.

In short, Maritain might be counted among those who could

argue that an adequate normative conception of democracy,

grounded in Christian political ethics, can be neither

fully majoritarian nor minoritarian. His thinking even

suggests that the majoritarian-minoritarian distinction

may not be the best way to think about democracy. Here he

does not serve the purpose of Novak who would like to

place him much more in the minoritarian camp.[121] Maritain

has a much more positive attitude about politics,

including governmental politics, than Novak. Maritain's

conceptions of pluralism and subsidiarity are more nuanced

than Novak's, allowing for a greater range of state action

than Novak seems comfortable with. Novak argues most

forcefully when praising the merits of free market

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[121]Novak, <u>Free Persons and the Common Good</u>. See
also John W. Cooper, <u>A Theology of Freedom: The Legacy of
Jacques Maritain and Reinhold Niebuhr</u> (Macon, GA: Mercer
University Press, 1985) for a position comparable to
Novak's.

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economics with its range of businesses and associations. He rarely sees a negative side to the operation of market forces. Maritain, on the other hand sees promise and peril in social pluralism of any type, including the pluralism of market economies. The rights of smaller associations can be limited for the common good. For Novak, the common good is achieved only when such associations are given relatively free reign in social life. Novak's conception of the common good amounts to an aggregate of individual goods, a conception which Maritian rejects.

If Maritain's conception of democracy attempts to incorporate both majoritarian and minoritarian elements, how does it take us beyond those political theorists who simply say that democracy must be both majoritarian and minority-protecting, yet do not give us any normative guidelines to assign a more definite place to these various concerns? Maritain's important contribution is precisely in pressing us to see that both kinds of concerns must be brought together in a more encompassing moral vision. They must be part of an overarching conception of the common good, and our conception of the common good can help us understand the role and relative weight of these various concerns. Maritain does not give us a detailed, substantive analysis of how this project can be carried out. Instead, he points us in a

potentially fruitful direction. Furthermore, with his

idea of concrete historical ideals, Maritain suggests that

the relative weight of majoritarian and minoritarian

concerns in a normative conception of democracy, is

historically conditioned, within limits. Again, this is a

potentially rich insight. Finally, Maritain helps us in

our task of constructing an adequate normative conception

of democracy by placing before us the need to consider the

kinds of institutions needed for an adequate embodiment of

our moral norms.

While Maritain offers our inquiry a great deal, we

cannot ignore certain cracks in the foundation of

Maritain's thought. While we are grateful to Maritain for

opening up a whole range of metaphysical issues, certain

aspects of his own metaphysical position are suspect. One

primary criticism to be leveled is that in constructing

his individual-person distinction out of a distinction

between the material and the spiritual, Maritain

introduces a problematic tension into his philsophical-

theological ethic that threatens to mitigate its force.

In Maritain's view of the human, personality is the

spiritual principle within the human and individuality is

the material principle. He asserts that his view avoids

the mind-body dualism of Descartes.[122] Perhaps it does,

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[122]Maritain, _Person_, 36.

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but it does not avoid a view of materiality as the primary source of evil in human life. Such a position seems untenable. First of all, it neglects the ways in which our bodily experience is "a fundamental realm of the experience of God."[123] For Maritain, it is the spiritual person who has a direct relation to God, though such a person cannot be separated from their individuality. Secondly, such a position has associations with the exclusion of women from full participation in human affairs.[124] Finally, such a position tends to neglect the spiritual sources of human sin and evil.

Not only is a spiritual-material duality untenable in itself, it introduces an unneeded tension into Maritain's ethic. By subtly lowering the status of material existence, though this is not his intent, Maritain tends to undermine his very insistence on the importance of political and economic life. Put another way, his theological metaphysics does not offer as much support to his own political ethic as he would like it to.

A related shortcoming of Maritain's ethic is his treatment of human neediness and relationality. He describes the human person as "a poor material

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[123]James B. Nelson, Body Theology (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 43.

[124]Robin May Schott, Cognition and Eros (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

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individual... more poverty-stricken than all other animals... a person destitute and full of needs."[125] On the other hand, the person, as person, is an independent whole. This raises "independence" to higher level than neediness. Now Maritain argues that even as persons we are social. Such sociality arises more out of the person's desire to give than out of any sense that we contribute substantively to the lives of others. Maritain lacks a convincing language to discuss human relationality as constitutive of personhood. At the same time, portions of Maritain's ethic seem to assume just such a view of human persons and relationships.

Another important criticism to be levelled against Maritain's ethic is its inadequate treatment of conflict. David Hollenbach has argued that Roman Catholic social ethics has suffered from an inadequate appreciation of the depth and persistence of conflict in society.[126] Hollenbach argues that major statements on social ethics prior to Vatican II tended to assume that competing social claims could be harmonized under the paternal guidance of the state. They assumed that a proper ordering of claims could be discovered by rational reflection, and that such an ordering was a "given."[127] However, Hollenbach argues

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125Maritain, Rights, 97. Maritain, Person, 60.

126Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict, 160-167.

127Ibid., 160, 162-163.

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that Catholic social teaching since Vatican II has come to recognize the inadequacy of the notion of a pre-established ordering of claims. Rather such order is seen as "instrumental and developing." Hollenbach concludes that Catholic social teaching must develop a model of social ethics which further recognizes "conflict and community as dynamically interrelated."[128]

Maritain's ethic can be seen as an ethic moving in the right direction according to Hollenbach, though still suffering from the temptation to underestimate both the persistence of conflict and its potential. Maritain's recipe for the common good often comes across as a recipe that requires no eggs be broken. His way of relating majoritarian and minoritarian concerns at times neglects the potential conflicts between their respective concerns. Some passages in Maritain's work suggests that harmonious blending of varying claims is possible according to a rationally considered model. Referring to society as an organic unity has such implications.[129] However, Maritain more often seems to appreciate that whatever measure of the common good is achieved will be achieved within the flux of history, where differing ideas of the common

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[128]Ibid., 164-165.

[129]Maritain, Humanism, 163-164.

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good vie against one another.[130]   These tensions in

Maritain's view of conflict are never adequately resolved.

The aforementioned concerns represent the greatest

difficulties with Maritain's ethic. However, they are not

the only difficulties. While admiring much in Maritain's

work, we must also admit that he leaves a number of

important normative concepts underdeveloped, e.g. freedom,

equality, justice and power. On the one hand we can

understand the limitations on any thinker who sweeps

through the range of material Maritain addresses.

Nevertheless, the importance he gives to these concepts

hardly seems consistent with their underdevelopment.

Maritain asserts that justice is the first condition of

good politics and necessary for common life, yet his

understanding of justice is never spelled out.

The political ethic of Jacques Maritain, and his

treatment of political democracy, is certainly a boon to

our task of constructing an adequate normative conception

of democracy on Christian political-ethical terms.

Christian moral vision includes normative "recipes" for

the common good at various levels of moral discourse.

Within this recipe, a normative conception of political

democracy must include both majoritarian and minoritarian

concerns, but their inclusion depends on the larger

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[130]Maritain, _Rights_, 163-164.

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normative vision. Maritain's insistence on the importance
of history and of concrete political institutions is also
helpful. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the limitations
present in Maritain's ethic. As we move to consider the
Christian political ethic of Douglas Sturm, we will
encounter another metaphysical perspective. Will it
provide us with a more adequate perspective within which
to incorporate Maritain's essential insights? Will Sturm,
himself, incorporate many of these insights? As we turn
to Sturm's process ethic, these questions will help guide
our discussion.

CHAPTER VI

DOUGLAS STURM: PROCESS ETHICS
AND POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

The Christian social and political ethic of Douglas
Sturm resembles the work of Jacques Maritain in that Sturm
formulates his ethic within a broad metaphysical
framework. Process philosophy provides the metaphysical
perspective within which Sturm constructs his theological
ethic. John Cobb has called the publication of Sturm's
major work, Community and Alienation "a major landmark for
those interested in bringing process thought effectively
and realistically to bear on public affairs."[1]

Sturm asserts that the principle of internal
relations is central to process metaphysics and ontology.
This principle provides a more adequate expression of the
relational character of human experience, and gives us a
better understanding of, and ability to confront, the
crises in our public life.[2]

Sturm not only works out his ethical thought in
dialogue with a meaningful theological-metaphysical

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[1]John B. Cobb, "Review of Community and Alienation,"
Journal of Church and Society 31 (1989): 555.

[2]Douglas Sturm, Community and Alienation (Notre
Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 168, 60.

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perspective, he also engages in a serious dialogue with significant sources of social and political thinking outside of theological ethics. We find frequent references to important socio-political theorists like Lindsay, Dahl, Giddens, MacPherson, Tawney and Geertz. Even though Sturm takes seriously the work of political theorists, his thinking on political democracy remains underdeveloped. We will not find him directly responding to the question which we are bringing to each of our theological ethicists, that of the place of majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in an adequate normative conception of political democracy. However, as with our other ethicists, we will attempt to gather certain threads of Sturm's conception of democracy and bring them together to see how they might address the majoritarian-minoritarian debate.

We begin our discussion of Sturm's ethic of political democracy with a discussion of his basic philosophical-theological stance, focusing on his views of the human and of God. We will go on to explore Sturm's theologically-grounded political ethic. From there we will discuss his views on political democracy and offer an assessment of his thinking.

Sturm's Theological-Philosophical Stance

Before proceeding into the substance of Sturm's philosophical-theological stance, it would be helpful to

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bring to light an underlying premise in his work. Sturm sees an inherent relationship between description, understanding, interpretation and normative principles.[3] The principle of internal relations "is a basis for understanding what public life is and what it ought to be." "A relational understanding of self and its constitutive relations is simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive."[4] We will see how this relationship between description and prescription, between interpretation and normative direction is woven into the fabric of Sturm's ethic.

The principle of internal relations, a core element in proces thought, serves as a basis both for understanding and evaluation in Sturm's ethic. The cosmological thought of Alfred North Whitehead provides the broader context within which Sturm understands the concept of internal relations. Sturm summarizes his understanding of Whitehead's basic cosmology in the following passage.

> The primary unit of reality... is the event, the actual occasion, a concrescence of prehensions. An event is a process of becoming which issues from other events but forms and presents its own originality for all other events. An event is what it is because of the character of its relationships to its past and to its anticipated future.... Negatively, the principle

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[3]Ibid., 3, 4, 23, 38.

[4]Ibid., 3, 205.

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of internal relations means that apart from its
relationships, an entity cannot be what it is.
Positively, it means that an entity is what it is
through its creative synthesis of the multiplicity of
relata into a unique character.[5]

The principle of internal relations helps us

reconsider the character of human experience. It moves

one to acknowledge a "dimension of depth" in our exper-

ience. "An adequate understanding of experience must

include respect for mystery; life is living in a dynamic

context whose complete character can never be totally

comprehended."[6]

In this depth dimension of experience, there is a

connection with all other events and ultimately with God.

These connections or relations "are constitutive of the

individual, although the individual synthesizes these

relations in a selective and unique fashion."[7] Still

another way of describing the principle of internal

relations is to say that "there is a continuously creative

communal ground out of which we, as individuals and in our

various associations, emerge and to which we are

responsible."[8] The principle of internal relations thus

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[5]Ibid., 34. See also Sturm, "Property: A Relational
Perspective," in Economic Life, ed. Franklin I. Gamwell
and W. Widick Schroeder (Chicago: Center for the
Scientific Study of Religion, 1988), 68-69.

[6]Sturm, Community, 82-83.

[7]Ibid., 169, 31.

[8]Ibid., 141-142.

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provides a grounding for an ethic. Sturm also argues that the principle of internal relations provides a more adequate ground for organizing society as it faces contemporary crises than does the principle of individualism which currently holds sway in our culture.[9]

The principle of internal relations, which Sturm places at the center of an adequate understanding of the nature of reality, definitively shapes both a cosmology and an ontology. It also shapes an anthropology and a "theology," that is, a view of the human and of God.

For Sturm, as for others, the roots of political thought are found in a view of the human person. In keeping with his ontology, the primary feature of this view of the human is the assertion that relationships and community are constitutive of individuality.[10] "Each person and association is understood as existing within a context of relationships which are constitutive of its meaning and being."[11] This point is made in a variety of ways and we examine some of the more significant ones for the various formulations often hold different subtleties and nuances that ought not to be missed.

The positions taken by theologians, philosophers, scientists and other scholars are often defined by

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[9]Ibid., 12.

[10]Ibid., 108, 2, 74.

[11]Ibid., 83.

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opposing positions. The primary foil for Sturm's politi-
cal ethic is "individualism." "Individualism... is a
constraint, depriving us of a deeper, more complex
understanding of ourselves and a richer, more thickly
textured sense of the goodness of our lives."[12]
Individualism offers a truncated view of human
individuality. Individuality, on the other hand,
including human individuality, is an emergence, a creative
synthesis.[13] This is not meant to deny significance to
individuality, only to situate it more adequately.

Sturm argues that being human involves an interplay
of separation and engagement. "Our lives manifest a
polarity between individuation and participation."[14]
These conceptualizations are carried through into under-
standings of human action and identity. Humans are agents
who act, but all action is also interaction. Inter-
actions shape our very identity as human selves. "We are
constantly creating and recreating ourselves... through
interactions with one another and with the world of
nature."[15] These processes of action, interaction, and
human becoming have a public dimension to them. The human
is not only social by nature but also public.

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[12]Ibid., 1.

[13]Ibid., 3.

[14]Ibid., 170, 2.

[15]Ibid., 61, 68.

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> The irreducible individuality that characterizes each
> self is not an isolated or merely private
> individuality; it is public in its dependency and in
> its implication.... The self's identity cannot be
> comprehended apart from its past or its future, its
> given environment or its creative formation.[16]

Another aspect of Sturm's basic position on the human is his understanding of the self-world relation. For Sturm, the self and the world exist for each other.[17] They are engaged in a continuous process of interaction. "The world is the condition for the self's realization and the self, in turn, is a contribution to the on-going world." Furthermore, God and the world are engaged in constant interchange. An adequate understanding of the human self includes the relationship between the self and God. "The self thus exists in a matrix of relationships whose dominant member is God."[18] We will inquire into Sturm's view of God shortly.

The self exists in a matrix of relationships, and sin is understood in relational terms. Without using the word "sin," the following passage characterizes Sturm's understanding of the concept.

> Individuals and institutions are prone to do violence
> in ways subtle and flagrant to the network of
> relations on which they depend, within which they find
> their meaning, and for which they bear
> responsibility.[19]

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[16]Ibid., 41.

[17]Ibid., 184-185.

[18]Ibid., 232.

[19]Ibid., 84.

Sturm's understanding of "alienation," which we will explore when we discuss his political ethic, gives us a more detailed picture of his understanding of sin and its effects.

Having sketched Sturm's theological-philosophical anthropology, we need to explore his understanding of God. God is the dominant member of the relational matrix in which human beings exist. We begin our analysis with Sturm's understanding of the ideas of religious sensibility and faith. Within a process perspective, "religious sensibility is responsiveness to the full context of one's existence."[20] Faith is a conjoint concept. Faith is defined as "appreciative awareness, as openness of the human spirit to the most fundamental realities of experience, even to the life of God."[21] The reality of God is part of the depth of human experience. God is "the Ultimate Efficacy in the creative passage of events."[22] This view does not imply that God's intention for each experience is made actual. Faith involves an openness to the intention of God. Sin involves closing off that openness, doing violence to that relationship. Individuals and institutions are prone to sin.

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[20]Ibid., 12.

[21]Ibid., 165.

[22]Ibid., 2.

We can encounter God in the depths of our human
experiences. "God is the objective ground of confidence
in the ultimate significance of the world and, in
particular, of human activity."[23] God is the objective
ground of our confidence in the significance of the world
because God "unifies and preserves the world" and "calls
the world forward to new creation and qualitative
achievement." God is at work in the interplay between
"the persistent past and open future."[24] The concern of
God for qualitative achievement translates into a concern
for both "the interior dispositions of one's psychic life"
and "the forms and texture of communal life."[25]

Qualitative achievement can be further characterized
in covenantal terms. God's action possesses covenantal
qualities. Qualities of peace, righteousness, justice,
steadfastness, loving kindness are simultaneously
"qualities of divine action and the pattern for human
community."[26] God not only provides the objective ground
for our confidence in the significance of the world, God
also provides the ground for moral norms.

We might note at this point some of the general
moral principles generated by Sturm's theological-
philosophical stance. Some of these will be discussed

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[23]Ibid., 213.   [24]Ibid., 84-84.

[25]Ibid., 93.   [26]Ibid., 131.

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more fully when we analyze his political ethic. The
covenantal qualities listed above serve as moral norms in
their function as the pattern for human community. Sturm
argues, in another passage, that his view of the self as
situated in a matrix of relationships, with God as the
dominant member, generates three principles: autonomy,
relationality and community.[27] Each of these principles
has an ethical import which might be translated into more
traditional ethical language as principles of liberty,
equality and common good. Sturm distinguishes two types
of principles: 1) interpretive principles, which help
persons see the world more adequately, and 2) moral
principles, which guide action and character formation.
Given Sturm's argument for the deep connection between
understanding and normative concerns, we ought not be
surprised that some concepts serve double duty as
interpretive and normative principles. He ought to be
clearer, however, in distinguishing which sense of the
word principle he is using. He often leaves this to his
readers.

In addition to the principles already noted, Sturm
argues that our moral action and reflection needs to
consider a principle of covenant.[28] Here again, the use
of principle is ambiguous. Covenant can serve as an

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[27]Ibid., 233, 164-165.

[28]Ibid., 234.

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interpretive principle, as a conception conjoined with the

principle of internal relations. Covenant also has

normative connotations.

> The idea of a social covenant bespeaks a world in
> which we already belong together but are called
> repeatedly to acknowledge that fact anew and to
> determine what the forms of our life together shall
> be.... In its theological meaning, the idea of
> covenant is grounded in that God who intends a
> universal community of being and to whom each self is
> related in and through all other relationships.[29]

Sturm calls his basic theological-philosophical

stance a deeper realism.

> A deeper realism contains within its purview the
> grounds for that persistent hopefulness that sustains
> the human spirit and is supportive of movements for
> social and political transformation.[30]

This deeper realism is a function of ontology. However,

realism also forces us "to stare directly at the underside

of our personal and institutional relations."[31] To

understand that underside, one must have some conception

of what ought to be, of the norms that define the moral

life. Sturm most fully expresses these norms in his

political ethic.

Sturm's Communitarian Political Ethic

Sturm's political ethic has a guiding vision at its

center, an originating vision of public life.[32] He offers

some reflection on the idea of vision and its place in

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[29]Ibid., 186.   [30]Ibid., 6.

[31]Ibid., 76, 52.   [32]Ibid., 18.

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ethical reflection. Sturm argues that "utopianism has a positive function to play in our experience; it is intended to inspire, to spur us to action." The destiny of the public life of a nation is, in part, "a possibility to be shaped by our imagination and action;" it rests on "the character of our religious insight and political action."[33] A similar line of thought is developed in Sturm's reflection on religious myth. Religious myth "frames a critical perspective from which to view, understand, interpret, and judge one's self, one's institutions, one's society, one's surroundings."[34] Social criticism has an obligation to propose some vision, some sense of right. It must also formulate moral principles congruent with that vision.[35]

Sturm gives the vision at the core of his political ethic various names. He argues that the essays which together comprise his major work, Community and Alienation, are all efforts toward the construction of a "communitarian political theory."[36] The vision at the center of Sturm's political ethic might be called a communitarian vision. It is a vision that has both interpretive and normative aspects. Such vision is also labeled "the vision of an open society." The vision at

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[33]Ibid., 52, 10.　　　[34]Ibid., 202.

[35]Ibid., 95.　　　[36]Ibid., 6.

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the center of Sturm's ethic might finally be called a
covenant vision.[37] Each of these labels emphasizes
differing aspects of the central vision. The latter two
phrases lean more toward the normative aspects of the
guiding vision. We understand the importance of this
broad vision when we examine the political-ethical
principles Sturm articulates as consistent with the
vision.

We continue our examination of Sturm's political
ethic by seeking to understand his view of political
theory. "A fundamental aim of political theory is to
disclose the grounds and meaning of political activity."[38]
This definition of political theory suggests descriptive
and normative tasks. Political theory often originates in
a sense of something gone wrong in public life. A
political theory, arising out of a larger vision of the
meaning of public life and of human existence, not only
articulates a sense of something gone wrong, but seeks to
diagnose the problems in public life. It provides a way
to talk politics.[39] For Sturm, the larger vision which
informs his political theory is grounded in process
metaphysics and its principle of internal relations. His

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[37]Ibid., 85, 233-234.

[38]Ibid., 31.

[39]Ibid., 52-53.

theory of the ground and meaning of political life
includes within it a communitarian political ethic.[40]

A political ethic generates norms for guiding action
in the public arena. For Sturm human existence, as such,
has a public dimension to it. Our lives are shaped by the
relational context within which we live, and we, in turn,
contribute to that context. Public life, therefore, is a
more or less adequate expression of our essential
relatedness as human persons. The way we organize
ourselves publicly ought to be a more adequate expression
of the relational character of reality, for instance, "a
political association is therefore perverse if it is
arbitrarily exclusionary, rigidly nationalistic, even
narrowly humanistic."[41] Here Sturm asserts a close
relationship between "public" and "political," but the
relationship between these two concepts is never
adequately clarified. In fact, his entire discussion of
the concept of the public suffers from vague generalities,
even though it has illuminating aspects.

Public life is a construction, not a given. We are
always in the process of forming and reforming it. An
enriched public life requires civility, that is, "the
attitude which enables transactions to proceed without
close acquaintanceship." Sturm argues that contemporary

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[40]Ibid., 4-5.

[41]Ibid., 84.

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American society is not adequately forming itself as a public. We are experiencing a reduction of the public realm and an eclipse of citizenship.[42]

An important and related concept to the public in Sturm's ethic is the concept of "the polity," or "the polis."

> The polis is distinguished from other communities by its inclusiveness.... The political community is the inclusive association because it incorporates all the associations and activities, resources and responsibilities desirable for the development of a human life.... It is the community of communities.[43]

Put another way, the polity is "the inclusive form of coordinated activity among persons and groups."[44] Sturm's conception of the polity seems comparable to Maritain's conception of the political society. This discussion of the polity, or the political community, also suggests that "the political" occupies a narrower range of human activity and experience than that covered by the term "public."

Sturm's ethic supplies norms for identifying the shape of a good public life. We begin our exploration of the normative concepts in this political ethic with the most important one, the common good.

Sturm describes the common good, or the public good, as the central value in public life. It is the purpose

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[42]Ibid., 11, 14-15.   [43]Ibid., 40-41.

[44]Ibid., 42.

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and meaning of political life. The common good should be the first virtue of social institutions.[45] Individuals, in their political lives, are called to contribute to the common good.[46] While the common good has been defined in a number of different ways, Sturm's concern is to delineate its meaning consistent with process thought.

Sturm's basic definition of the meaning of the common good is that "the common good is that texture of relationships in which the life of all is enhanced by the actions and dispositions of each one."[47] Like Maritain, Sturm does not reject the importance of individual persons in his view of the common good. "To act in the public good is not to deny the individuality of persons or associations, but it is to reject the indifference to others of individualism."[48] The common good is intended to be that texture of relationships which is a goodness for the community and for all.[49]

As we begin to explore the more concrete import of this normative principle, we find both procedural and substantive elements. The procedures by which a community sets its policies and conducts its work "constitute the quality of the community." "Procedures are ways of living

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[45]Ibid., 85, 73, 75, 165.   [46]Ibid., 50.

[47]Ibid., 162.   [48]Ibid., 85.

[49]Ibid., 170.

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together through time."[50] Sturm provides a nice summary

of the procedural and substantive dimensions of the common

good in the following passage.

> The common good is a quality of community life....
> Procedurally, it means participating in the
> deliberations and decisions of a community and its
> members. Substantively, it embraces several qualities
> - in material life, physical well-being; in economic
> production, meaningful work; in social life, civic
> friendship; in group relation, peaceable means of
> interaction; in cultural life, an open spirit -
> whatever conduces to the enhancement of the life of
> its members.[51]

This is the best summary of Sturm's more concrete

considerations of the common good. Yet he offers a few

more general characterizations worthy of note. The common

good is a principle of religious ethics with deep roots in

the Christian faith tradition. The religious name of the

common good is love.[52] A more adequate way to put this

point might be to say that the norm of love expresses

itself in social ethics through the principle of the

common good.

The common good is meant to be "expressive of the

meaning of being a self within the world." It also

expresses the deepest meaning of freedom.[53] Sturm defines

freedom in terms of the common good. He also understands

justice, which he recognizes as another central concern

within Western religious thought, in relation to the

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[50]Ibid., 171.   [51]Ibid., 185.

[52]Ibid., 166, 73, 162.   [53]Ibid., 167, 172.

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common good. At one point, Sturm writes that although justice and the common good are not contradictory principles of public life, "the common good does not always rest easily with the demands of justice.... Personal goals and communal needs may exist in a perpetual tension."[54] Yet Sturm also suggests a greater continuity between justice and the common good. In his essay "On Meanings of Justice," Sturm argues that one of the meanings of justice is justice as community. At that point considerations of justice and of the common good merge.[55]

Sturm utilizes two other important concepts in delineating his understanding of the common good, "civilization" (borrowed from Whitehead) and "the covenantal community." "The common good, in a broad sense, is the realization in social life of the qualities of civilization."[56] Civilization is a version of the common good and a norm of public life.[57] It is a version of the common good which serves as an illusive ideal, "a distant telos calling for constant transformation of given political forms." In the terminology we used in our discussion of Maritain, we might say that the norm of civilization serves as a form of the eschatological common

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[54]Ibid., 27. Also 95.   [55]Ibid., 102.

[56]Ibid., 50.

[57]Sturm, "Property," 69.

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good, though Sturm does not use these terms. The
qualities of civilization include "truth, beauty art,
adventure and peace."[58] The norm of civilization serves
as a groundwork for a doctrine of human rights.[59]

Sturm describes the covenant as a religious myth
which reveals important truths about human life, in
particular about our essential relatedness. The defining
qualities of covenantal relationships overlap those used
to describe the norm of civilization, i.e., peace,
righteousness, justice, steadfastness, loving kindness.[60]

The common good serves as the fundamental norm in
Sturm's political ethic. It is defined, in part, by the
norm of civilization derived from Whitehead and the norm
of the covenantal community taken from Western religious
thought. The common good is also an overarching norm
containing a number of principles internal to it. The
common good is a composite norm, comprised of subordiante
norms which help to define it more fully.

We have already mentioned a certain lack of clarity
in Sturm's discussion of the relation between justice and
the common good. In general terms, he argues that justice
is an ordinary, everyday demand of the common good.[61]

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[58]Sturm, Community, 42.

[59]Sturm, "Property," 69.

[60]Sturm, Community, 203-204, 131, 113.

[61]Ibid., 162.

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Here justice takes the role of a component principle of the common good. This seems to be the position Sturm most consistently maintains, other passages to the contrary. He also describes justice as the paramount principle of politics. A third general remark is that the particular content of justice is shaped by the concrete relationships in which a person is situated.[62] "Justice" is developed within these broad parameters.

In his essay, "On Meanings of Justice," Sturm recognizes that the term "justice" is open to a variety of meanings.[63] He discusses four such meanings, each of which could be fitted into his broad characterization of justice, namely justice as liberty, justice as equality, justice as community, and justice as wisdom. He argues that each of these meanings of justice has something to contribute to an adequate understanding of this important moral principle. Each of these principles of justice "complements the others and is expressive of a vital dimension of moral experience." Nevertheless, the principles are in tension with one another. They "clash at the point of decision and action." This is an important recognition of the inevitability of conflicting claims in the moral life. Even so, Sturm wants to argue that such tensions ought not blind us to the possibilities

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[62]Ibid., 26, 133.

[63]Ibid., 96.

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of synthesis. Taken together, these principles might form the substance of the moral virtue of civility.[64]

To leave the matter here, with justice viewed simply as another way to discuss the virtue of civility, would be to do an injustice to Sturm's conceptualization. Sturm's understanding of justice includes elements more amenable to translation as moral action guides. He defines justice in generic terms as giving everyone one's due. Such giving due includes respect for the dignity of persons.[65] Both of these characterizations of justice are consistent with each of the aforementioned principles of justice and with the broad parameters discussed earlier. Justice also serves as "a directive that every person should be granted those rights and resources needed for effective participation in public life."[66] To do justice means to honor rights and meet needs.[67] These characterizations of justice serve more directly as moral action-guides. They are more akin to justice as liberty, equality, and community.

Justice as wisdom reminds us that all structures of justice are limited. Perfect justice transcends the world of human interaction. Here a decidedly eschatological note enters Sturm's ethic. Justice as wisdom reminds us

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[64]Ibid., 108-110.   [65]Ibid., 96, 26, 142.

[66]Ibid., 26.   [67]Ibid., 206.

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of the complexity of the demands of justice as liberty, equality and community. "To know justice requires wisdom."[68]

When we arrive at Sturm's discussion of justice as wisdom we find ourselves wondering if he is trying to pack too much into this one conceptual suitcase. Any moral principle requires a measure of wisdom for its fruitful enactment. Developing moral virtues is also a necessary part of the moral life which includes living by principles. It would be better to confine the meaning of justice, centering it in Sturm's generic definition and elaborating its meaning in keeping with his view of human nature and human rights and needs. One can and should acknowledge that at its edges the concept of justice moves into broader moral considerations, considerations included in the common good as an overarching moral principle. It would be in keeping with the spirit, and with the main thrust of Sturm's ethic, to argue for viewing justice as near the center of the common good, but that aspects of the common good seem to move beyond considerations of justice.

Most adequate conceptions of justice include the concept of rights within their purview. Sturm's discussion of rights does not contain the elaborate listing

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[68]Ibid., 107.

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of various types of right that we encountered in Maritain. His discussion is more general. Human rights are requisites to creativity. They are enabling.[69] Sturm's understanding of rights is helpfully explored in his discussion of civil liberties as rights. Civil liberties function to protect individuals from despotic power, providing persons with the necessary social space required for creative self-expression. However, civil liberties are also "a means for effective participation in communal decisions." "Rights enable persons to speak and act."[70]

> In general, civil liberties constitute an institu-
> tional form for communal interchange and for novel
> thought and action. Within the political association,
> they secure the possibility of creative contribution
> to the growth of qualitative achievement.[71]

Civil liberties, thus understood, have a priority over property rights, though Sturm does not seem to grant them any absolute status. They are a significant ingredient in his recipe for the common good. Rights are not ends in themselves. They are abused both when they are suppressed and when they are used irresponsibly, that is, not employed for the common good.[72]

Another important moral concept often linked to a discussion of rights and justice is the concept of freedom. Sturm distinguishes two general tendencies in defining freedom, namely to view freedom as "freedom from"

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[69]Ibid., 50, 99, 51.   [70]Ibid., 87, 178.

[71]Ibid., 92.   [72]Ibid., 91, 50.

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or to view it as "freedom for." Sturm, while not neglecting the importance of the former, emphasizes the importance of "freedom for," freedom for "active participation in the process of communal decision making."[73] Freedom is the requisite for adventure, that is, the quality of creativity in civilization.[74] Freedom ought to be an active moral consideration. The principle of freedom reminds us that resort to compulsion, even when justifiable, carries some cost.[75] Sturm's particular conceptualization of freedom gives him grounds for arguing that his ethic represents an attempt to more fully realize the principle of autonomy so cherished in modernity.[76]

Peace, another component of the common good, is both a religious and political concept. Peace is a quality of experience, a deepening and broadening of experience.[77] Peace affirms the solidarity of a community. "Loyalty and trust, concern and care, harmony and order are among its political aspects." The concept of peace provides a moral grounding for the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship.[78]

To adequately understand Sturm's political ethic, we

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[73]Ibid., 124.

[74]Sturm, "Property," 69-70.

[75]Sturm, Community, 98.

[76]Ibid., 163-164.

[77]Ibid., 50-51.   [78]Sturm, "Property," 70.

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must turn from the heights of peace to the depths of alienation, the central concept Sturm uses in his discussion of the public side of sin and evil. Human life, as such, has a public dimension to it. Sin has already been defined in terms of doing violence to the network of relationships within which we exist as persons. Sin has political and institutional dimensions which need to be explored as the final act in our consideration of Sturm's basic political ethic.

Corruption and evil are pervasive in the traditional forms of our public life.

> Alienation... is a negative form of belonging....
> Alienation... is the reverse side of community; it constitutes a distortion or degradation of the normative dimension of the principle of internal relations. As a result of alienation, whatever its precise forms, the whole world suffers.[79]

Alienation distorts or twists human connections. In an alienated relationship, persons are caught in a web of interaction which does them harm. They reproduce structures of relationships "which fail to do justice to the meaning of our selves as interactive beings."[80] Alienation is the central political problem. It represents the reverse side of the common good.[81]

From a political and institutional perspective, alienation means that "one is led to the reproducing of

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[79]Sturm, _Community_, 4, 5.

[80]Ibid., 69.   [81]Ibid., 62, 185.

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institutional structures which result in one's anguish."[82]
Sturm describes these degenerate institutional forms in a
variety of ways. Institutional forms dominated by
alienation are deficient in the qualities of civiliza-
tion. Persons are caught in patterns of activity that are
contrary to their own good.[83] Political institutions
marred by alienation fail to do justice.

Sturm suggests that alienation can hide behind masks
of moral principle. "All too often high-sounding appeals
have been used to cloak low-level operations."[84] To make
his point, he uses the example of principles of justice
utilized in promoting sheer self-interest. He also argues
that the concept of community, often used normatively,
contains a dark side. Communities can be exclusionary and
ingrown.

Having explored the wide range of Sturm's basic
political ethic, we now turn our attention to the
discussion of democracy built on this foundation.

Process Ethics and Political Democracy

The common good is a composite norm and the norms
which comprise the common good are meant to guide life in
the polity. Sturm argues that if we take these norms
seriously, we ought to be about the task of enriching our

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[82]Ibid., 62.   [83]Ibid., 43, 23, 62.

[84]Ibid., 106, see also 181.

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public life. Where does "politics" fit in here? While

Sturm never adequately clarifies the relationship between

the terms "public" and "politics," exploring the

relationship between these two concepts is important for

understanding Sturm's ethic.

> Politics is the public dimension of our common
> existence. Politics, in the deepest and broadest
> sense, is the public side of the adventure in which
> the entire community of being is involved.[85]

While this text rather clearly identifies the

political and the public, this position is not

consistently maintained. Elsewhere, Sturm characterizes

politics as "the master art of the public world." "It is

the art of organizing the people toward the realization of

the common good."[86] This second sense of "politics," in

which it serves as a sub-category of public life seems

more helpful. Working with it, we could say that the norm

of the common good is intended to direct our public life,

but as politics is the master art of organizing public

life, political processes ought to be particularly

cognizant of the demands of the common good. The

distinction also allows us to assert that public life is

more than politics. All politics is public, but not all

of public life is politics. Finally, this distinction

between politics and public makes more sense given some of

the other ways Sturm characterizes politics.

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[85]Ibid., 92.   [86]Ibid., 95.

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Politics ought to be concerned with "the formation

of creative community."[87] Citing democratic theorist A.

D. Lindsay, Sturm argues that political processes ought to

serve the community and make it more of a community in the

process.[88] Sturm is thus critical of the view of politics

which sees it as a process of determining who gets what,

when and how. This latter view, described as

transactional politics, is associated with individual-

istic political liberalism. Transactional politics pushes

questions of the quality of life from public discussion

and determination.[89] While this view of politics might

have some descriptive validity, it is not an adequate

normative conception. The contrasting position maintained

by Sturm serves as a political ideal.

> To Lindsay, the political ideal is a form of democracy
> in which principles of equality and liberty are
> informed by the religious sensibility of love.[90]

In political theory and political ethics, the

concept of politics usually leads one into a discussion of

government or the state. Sturm offers very little in the

way of explicit reflection on government, however.

Sturm's normative understanding of politics is one

in which questions about the quality of the common life of

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[87]Ibid., 32.

[88]Ibid., 20, 178.

[89]Ibid., 19-20.

[90]Ibid., 20.

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a polity ought to be open for "public debate and deter-
mination."[91] The notion of determination is important.
We need "a public space and directive agency through which
the peoples of the land... may debate over the meaning of
the common good and may plan for the future."[92] Politics,
then, is not just about discussion and debate, it is also
about decision-making. Any adequate conception of
government recognizes that some decisions need to be made
authoritatively, that is, need to be made so that they are
binding on the members of the polity. Sturm does not
spell this out, but rather assumes it.

Explicitly, Sturm defines government as a form of
"organized power."[93] Here we need to pull together
different threads of the discussion to construct a
coherent view of government not offered by Sturm. A
polity is an inclusive form of coordinated activity, an
inclusive community. The whole range of public activity
is part of the life of the polity or political society.
Coordinated activity implies that there are organizing and
coordinating processes occurring. Politics has to do with
organizing the life of the polity, with the goal of
achieving the common good. Now if such organizing and
coordination requires some measure of authoritative

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[91]Ibid., 20.

[92]Ibid., 61.

[93]Ibid., 87.

decision-making, as Sturm suggests, a focal point is needed for making such decisions. In keeping with Sturm's positions, we could define government as that form of organized power which is charged with making authoritative decisions for the polity through political processes. Government thus serves as a central organizing point for achieving the common good. Sturm does not discuss the role coercion might play as government makes decisions, though nothing he writes rules out its use. Here Sturm's position could take something from Franklin Gamwell, another process political ethicist who directly confronts the need for coercion in ordering public life.[94]

Other passages provide some support for our construction of a view of government based on Sturm's thought. Sturm's criticism of transactional politics extends to a criticism of government as simply conflict-management.[95] Government might engage in conflict-management, but more importantly it has the job of directing the polity to the achievement of the common good. This conception of government might allow for an expansion of governmental institutions. Sturm is cautious here, arguing that government, like any form of organized power, has a propensity to overreach its proper

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[94]Franklin I. Gamwell, <u>Beyond Preference</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 144.

[95]Sturm, <u>Community</u>, 20.

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jurisdiction and to abuse and exploit those whom it ought to serve.[96] Nevertheless, Sturm suggests that the principle of limited government tends to intensify "the bifurcation between the public and private sectors."[97]

We have spent this time discussing Sturm's view of politics and government because a normative conception of political democracy is generally formed as broad normative principles and normative conceptions of government are brought together. We will explore what Sturm explicitly says about political democracy and then tie the threads together to construct his view of political democracy as a normative form of government, paying particular attention to majoritarian and minoritarian issues.

The orienting concept for the meaning of political processes is that they serve the community and make it more of a community. The political ideal generated from this orienting concept, seen in the context of Sturm's broader metaphysical perspective, is a form of democracy where liberty and equality are informed by love.[98] From our initial discussion of theories of democracy in the first chapter, we remember that liberty and equality are two moral principles usually referred to when theorists discuss the meaning of democracy. Sturm adds love and

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[96]Ibid., 87.

[97]Ibid., 157.

[98]Ibid., 18-20.

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the common good as principles necessary to constructing a normative conception of democracy rooted in theological ethics. For Sturm, normative democracy could be labeled "common-good democracy." Sturm himself calls his normative view of democracy "participative democracy" or "social democracy."[99] One might also use the phrase "communitarian democracy" in describing this position, for Sturm views his ethic as communitarian, in opposition to "individualistic liberalism." He seeks to preserve some elements of the prevailing liberal tradition while moving beyond it.[100]

Sturm's discussion of political democracy has its beginnings in a simple definition of the concept. "Most simply put, democracy means a people as such shall have authority for the quality of its own life as a people." Varying theories and conceptions of democracy consistent with this simple definition can be formulated.[101] In formulating his constructive position, Sturm outlines two broad conceptions of political democracy, protective and participative. Each conception has a contribution to make to an adequate normative conception of democracy, but participative democracy will be primary.

The overriding purpose of protective democracy is protection, "to negate whatever forces threaten the

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[99]Ibid., 180.   [100]Ibid., 51, 13.

[101]Ibid., 176.

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privately determined life activity of the citizenry." The

procedures of protective democracy, i.e., its legally

defined rights and its institutional arrangements, are

designed to promote its purpose. Rights are here defined

as claims against the government. "Rights constituted a

preserve for the freedom of the citizenry." The proce-

dures of protective democracy, rights and institutions,

are meant, as well, to "constitute a method of consent."

The whole system of protective democracy presupposes that

the people will give their consent to the institutions by

which they are governed. Furthermore, the design of the

political system needs to be open to continuing consent,

for "what is authorized out of consent may be

unauthorized." Even though protective democracy rests on

a presupposition of consent, the very concept of consent

strains against the individualistic presuppositions of

protective democracy, according to Sturm.[102] A

participative conception of democracy is formulated in the

face of this tension.

Sturm argues that participative democracy is "more

sensitive to the meaning of its grounding in consent."

> Consent itself is the primordial act of forming a
> public. It is the determination to live together, to
> share in common destiny, to form a common life.[103]

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[102]Ibid., 177-178.

[103]Ibid., 178.

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Participative democracy "is concerned with the texture of relationship between personal and community life." This in contrast to protective democracy which gives priority to personal and private life. In participative democracy, rights are viewed more in terms of enabling persons to speak and act in the public sphere. Institutions ought to be structured so that persons have the opportunity to participate in the formulation of public policy.[104] These themes are subordinated in protective democracy.

The crucial concept in participative democracy is "participation." Participation is viewed as a "form of cooperation with others in the conduct of public business." Yet participation is more deeply and profoundly meant to be "expressive of the meaning of being a self in a community of selves." "It is a good to be cherished."[105] Sturm intimates that in protective democracy, participation serves mainly as a means to the end of protecting private life.

As Sturm conceives of participative democracy, it is more directly oriented toward the common good than democratic capitalism, which is a species of protective democracy. Sturm argues that participative democracy, concerned as it is with the quality of the life of a people as a whole, considers the basic questions of

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[104] Ibid., 178.

[105] Ibid., 179.

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economic life appropriate matters for "public

determination."[106]

> The institutional implication of the common good
> [understood procedurally and substantively], at least
> at this point in history, is, I would suggest, social
> democracy. Social democracy... means the extension of
> the democratic principle, the principle of public
> determination, into all modes of social life,
> including the economic.[107]

Sturm proposes the need for a new social covenant,

invoking the normative concept of covenant in connection

with participative democracy.[108]

Sturm's normative conception of democracy emphasizes

participation; it emphasizes conscious and intentional

public concern regarding the quality of public life. It

is a conception of democracy oriented toward the common

good, and decisively shaped by his understanding of the

common good and of covenantal ideas. When we discussed

these principles, we noted their grounding in Sturm's

basic metaphysical and theological position. His position

hangs together well. Having discussed the basic shape of

Sturm's normative conception of democracy, we must ask

about the place of majoritarian and minoritarian concerns

within it. While Sturm does not directly address these

issues, his political ethic for political democracy

provides some resources for doing so.

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[106]Ibid., 180.

[107]Ibid., 185.

[108]Ibid., 186.

Within Sturm's normative conception of political democracy, majoritarian elements predominate. The strong emphasis on political participation is more in keeping with majoritarian models of democracy than with minoritarian ones, though it need not simply be a majoritarian concern. Furthermore, while Sturm recognizes the potential, even the propensity of governments to overreach their legitimate functions, he is much more concerned with a diminishing public sphere and the predominance of private governance, by which he means social order governed by the interplay of private interests.[109] Capitalism is a prime example of private governance, for Sturm. In capitalism, economic decisions are made without public accountability and control, i.e. without public governance. Sturm identifies ways in which economic life in the United States has moved in the direction of more public governance of economic life.[110] He, in turn, advocates increasing the range of activity in which public determination plays a constructive role. At this point, two issues need clarification, the meaning of "public determination" and the relationship between government and the public sphere.

We previously knitted the notion of public determination into a theory of government. Now we address its

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[109]Ibid., 176.

[110]Ibid., 183-184.

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relation to the majoritarian-minoritarian issue. Public
determination implies decisions and actions. Nowhere does
Sturm spell out the manner in which decisions are to be
made, nor does he discuss the issue of decision-making
rules. Nevertheless, Sturm's very emphasis on the
importance of public determination and decision-making
seems more consistent with majoritarian models of
democracy. His primary concern is that the decision-
making process be open to creative participation by all
the members of the political society. Here again, this is
not simply a majoritarian concern. Nevertheless,
majoritarians tend to give more attention to the need for
authoritative decision-mkaing over a broad range of
issues.

Sturm argues for an enhancement and enrichment of
public life, but he does not equate this, necessarily,
with the growth of government. Once again this ethic
could benefit by taking cues from Franklin Gamwell.
Gamwell's book, Beyond Preference, presents an extended
case for the priority of independent public-regarding
associations given a comprehensive moral principle
formulated in terms of process thought. For Gamwell,
public life is broader than political life, and political
life is more than government.[111] Such distinctions are

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[111]Gamwell, 144-154.

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consistent with what we have discovered in Sturm's ethic, but it suffers by not explicitly exploring them. We could argue, from within Sturm's own ethic, that participative political democracy requires not only open channels for influencing public determination regarding quality-of-life issues through the government, but also calls for other significant opportunities for participating in the public life more broadly conceived. Sturm and Gamwell seem to agree on this important point.

While we have highlighted the predominating majoritarian elements of Sturm's normative conception of democracy, we cannot argue that his model of democracy is simply majoritarian. Sturm includes moral concerns important to minoritarian democracy. He acknowledges the dangers of government power, a characteristic theme within minoritarian democracy. Furthermore, he does not reject the importance of individual autonomy and his redefinition of it does not negate traditional ideas of freedom.

Perhaps Sturm's most significant incorporation of minoritarian themes into his political theory is found in his discussion of constitutional legitimacy. In an essay on corporations, Sturm describes three types of legitimacy: legal, constitutional and ontological.[112] While the focus of that essay is on the legitimacy of

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[112]Ibid., Chapter 6.

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modern business corporations, the principles are derived

from reflecting on issues regarding forms of government.

> Constitutionalism is a theory about the proper form of
> government. Constitutionalist doctrines and
> to protect the members of the political community from
> the overbearing power of central authority. 113
> power and of the abuse of power in the political
> sphere.... The key objective of constitutionalism is
> to protect the members of the political community from
> the overbearing power of central authority. 113

The primary value behind constitutionalism is the

autonomy of individuals and their voluntary associations.

It promotes this value by its structuring of government

institutions. Among the variety of institutions used to

promote the values underlying constitutionalism are:

mixed government, separation of powers, republicanism,

bicameralism, checks and balances, bills of rights,

judicial review and federalism. Each of these

institutional forms are intended to be means "of limiting

and controlling institutionalized power, of keeping

authority responsible, of holding accountable those who

make and implement policies for the community."114 These

institutional structures are often crucial elements in a

minoritarian conception of democracy, though not neglected

in certain forms of majoritarianism. However, Sturm also

sees each of these institutional forms as means for

opening up the policy-making process to wider participa-

tion by the citizenry.115

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[113]Ibid., 122-123.   [114]Ibid., 123-124.

[115]Ibid., 125.

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While the focus remains on procedural legitimacy in constitutionalism, the idea of participation points toward the issue of the broader human good. When this comes into play, constitutionalism, by itself, is an insufficient criterion for legitimacy. The legitimacy of any form of human association must also be determined by the impact of its institutions on the human good considered substantially. Constitutional legitimacy, containing a number of themes found in minoritarian models of democracy, must be put in the broader and more significant context of "ontological legitimacy," which does not negate the potential importance of constitutionalism. Ontological legitimacy evaluates forms of life in terms of the moral law and moral good.[116] In short, Sturm does not reject the moral principles behind minoritarian conceptions of democracy, but rather seeks to incorporate them into a more encompassing model of a morally legitimate form of democracy.

In conclusion, Sturm incorporates both majoritarian and minoritarian elements into his conception of an adequate normative model of political democracy. As with Maritain, the common good provides the overarching moral principle to guide us as we put together our recipe. Furthermore, the relative weight assigned to various

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[116]Ibid., 125, 128, 144.

concerns within this recipe should be influenced by the historical context within which one is working.

Assessing Sturm's Political Ethic for Democracy

Our exploration of the political ethic of Douglas Sturm has been an encounter with a first-rate ethicist. Sturm's ethic is richly developed both metaphysically and in political-ethical terms. We have discovered that Sturm and Maritain share some central convictions about the shape of Christian political ethics and about a normative conception of political democracy. As we argued in the previous chapter, the metaphysical position Maritain used in constructing his political ethic proved problematic on a few important points, particularly in the way it seemed to depreciate human bodily existence. The process metaphysics underlying Sturm's ethic does not suffer from these same problems and thus provides a more adequate grounding for Maritain's concerns.

Yet while process metaphysics overcomes some problems, there are those who argue that it has problems of its own. One set of issues raised against process thought revolves around the compatibility between process categories and doctrines of the Christian faith.[117]

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[117]David Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), and John Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity*, New York: Crossroad, 1987), Ch. 11, provide two examples.

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While Sturm does not address the whole spectrum of theological issues in his writings, he offers profound and compelling accounts of many traditional theological ideas, particularly the idea of covenant. Sturm's writings can be added to a significant list of works that reveal process theology to be a vital option in Christian theology and Christian ethics.[118]

Another set of issues raised about the adequacy of process thought centers on its adequacy in addressing important ethical concerns, particularly concerns about individual integrity. Two ethicists who have raised issues along this line are Max Stackhouse and Frank Kirkpatrick.

Stackhouse responds to one of the essays found in Sturm's book Community and Alienation in his essay "The Perils of Process."[119] He criticizes process thought for dissolving concrete entities into webs of relationships, considering this a lopsided overreaction to a metaphysics based on isolated entities.[120] He goes on to argue that the individualism Sturm so readily criticizes preserves "a

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[118]See John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

[119]Max B. Stackhouse, "The Perils of Process," in Process Theology and Social Thought, ed. John B. Cobb and W. Widick Schroeder (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1981), 103-112.

[120]Ibid., 108.

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realistic sense of the dignity of the person."[121]   By

implication, Stackhouse raises doubts that Sturm's process

perspective can do the same.

Frank Kirkpatrick's criticisms run along the same

lines, though he focuses on adequate models for persons-

in-community. Kirkpatrick questions the adequacy of

organic models of community, some of which arise out of

Whiteheadian process philosophy.[122] Kirkpatrick argues

that process thought, with its organic model of community,

is limited by its emphasis "on the absence of an enduring

individual capable of sustaining ongoing relations with

others."[123]

On the same page where Kirkpatrick offers this

criticism of process thought, however, he cites Daniel Day

Williams, a process theologian, in support of his own

mutual/personal model of community. This suggests that at

least some strains of process thought might meet the

challenges offered by both Stackhouse and Kirkpatrick. I

would argue that Sturm's conception of the person provides

adequately for the idea of an enduring individual.

Persons are relational, but their identities and

characters are formed by a process of creatively

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[121]Ibid., 111.

[122]Kirkpatrick, Community, Chapter 4.

[123]Ibid., 138.

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synthesizing these relationships. Individuality is irreducible. However, Sturm does not always serve as his own best advocate on these matters. In one essay, Sturm discusses his social theory and ethic in terms of the philosophy of organism and organic theory.[124] In another essay, he contrasts organic and relational social theory, taking a stand with the latter.[125] Sturm's development of Whiteheadian process thought in the area of social ethics might more clearly be identified as a relational social theory and ethic, having more in common with mutual/personal models of community than with Kirkpatrick's understanding of strictly organic models.

We can also gather support from others in defending process thought as a viable source for social ethics. Paul Bube directly responds to Stackhouse in a book on John Cobb's process theology and ethics. Bube identifies the issue raised by Stackhouse as whether "a philosophical theology which emphasizes change and process can formulate any strict principles such as rights and justice."[126] Simply because Sturm discusses rights and justice does not mean that the philosophical theology which grounds his ethic provides an adequate basis for such discussion.

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[124]Sturm, Community, 35.

[125]Ibid., 167-168.

[126]Paul Custodio Bube, Ethics in John Cobb's Process Theology (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 116.

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Bube argues that an adequate theory of justice requires some account of personal dignity as a basis for rights.[127] He goes on to argue that for process thought "a human being, which is quite vulnerable to... vast and complex relations and changes, is capable of maintaining great unity and identity of self."[128] Certainly this is true of Sturm's process perspective.

Ethicists working from the perspective of process theology must always be alert to concerns regarding personal identity and dignity. Christian ethics requires that we recognize the moral significance of individual persons. Nevertheless, process ethicists, can successfully include these concerns in their positions. Sturm's ethic displays the potential of process categories for ethical reflection. In addition, other aspects of Sturm's ethic enrich our understanding of political ethics and provide helpful resources for constructing an adequate normative conception of political democracy.

The similarity in structure between Sturm's ethic and those of Wogaman and Maritain gives us some confidence that a Christian ethic structured along these lines offers great potential for Christian political ethics and its treatment of political democracy. The content of Sturm's ethic includes many of the important concerns included in

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[127]Ibid., 117.

[128]Ibid., 120.

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Maritain's ethic, but it has been argued that Sturm's viewpoint provides a more adequate grounding for these normative concerns. Much of Maritain's ethic has parallels in Sturm's, requiring only relatively minor recasting.

Sturm's ethic is helpful in bringing the work of a variety of significant socio-political theorists into a Christian political ethics. One finds numerous references to important thinkers such as Dahl, MacPherson, Giddens, Gould, Pateman and Unger. Still, this ethic could benefit from further engagement with other socio-political theorists and even from an engagement with a broader range of the work of some of those already mentioned. Sturm does not critically appropriate some of the more detailed work Robert Dahl has done in democratic political theory. Such a dialogue could help flesh out a normative conception of democracy in more concrete terms.

In yet another way Sturm's ethic enriches us. Sturm suggests, that political democracy, normatively consider-ed, requires the enrichment of public life more generally. Active public dialogue is an essential part of a normative conception of democracy.

Finally, one of the most helpful features of Sturm's political ethic is his discussion of alienation. This understanding of alienation offers a profound explication of the idea of structural sin. However, Sturm's

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ontological realism, with its concept of alienation, could

benefit from more dialogue with Reinhold Niebuhr's

Christian realism. Niebuhr offers a range of sustained

and penetrating insights into social sin which complement

Sturm's general discussion.

The appreciative comments we have offered about

Sturm's ethic were joined to some critical remarks, mostly

of the kind that argued the need to develop this thinking

more in directions already broached. However, our

assessment of Sturm's ethic would be incomplete unless we

also faced a group of more serious criticisms.

In a revealing passage Sturm argues that a potential

deficiency of the relational perspective in its attempt to

understand and evaluate social life is that it risks

vagueness. Sturm's ethic succumbs to this danger on

occasion. There are places in this ethic where concepts

are not developed as carefully as we would like them to

be. A prime example of this is Sturm's use of the word

"principle." Sturm most often uses the word "principle"

to refer to a principle by which we can understand and/or

interpret the world. He also uses the term when

discussing moral principles. Both uses are appropriate.

The problem is that Sturm does not always make clear the

way in which he is using the term.

Another term that suffers from vagueness is

"communitarian." Identifying a position as

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"communitarian" might have been helpful when some of
Sturm's essays were first written, but the term has become
problematic. "Communitarian" points us in a direction,
but it requires more clarification given the variety of
positions now carrying that label. While Sturm is very
critical of individualistic liberalism, he does not reject
some of its accomplishments. His communitarianism
represents a rapprochement of sorts with liberalism.

Besides concerns over vague terminology, we can
raise three other significant issues with Sturm. We have
already discussed problems with Sturm's discussion of the
categories of "public" and "political." We can go on and
say that Sturm's ethic really needs a theory of
government. Certain elements of Sturm's ethic provide a
starting point, but only a starting point.

A second issue is also one we have mentioned.
Sturm's understanding of the relationship between justice
and the common good needs work. The common good serves as
Sturm's overarching norm for political life. Justice can
serve as one of the defining moral principles within the
common good, but what sort of priority might it have
compared to other principles? How does one reconcile the
conflicting claims that appeal to justice? These issues
need to be worked out more adequately. The whole issue of
conflict itself gets short shrift in Sturm's ethic. This
ethic does not preclude an appreciation for the depth and

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persistence of conflict in human social life, nor does it
preclude an appreciation for the positive potential of
conflict. Sturm simply has not given much attention to
the topic. Here again dialogue with Niebuhr can help.

A third issue to raise is also one we have mentioned
before, i.e., the development of "alienation" and "sin."
We have argued that the views here could also be more
adequately developed in dialogue with Niebuhr. They might
also be developed further within the process perspective
itself. Process thought gives a fair amount of attention
to the notion of time. New experiences arise from a
creative synthesis of relationships. Within this process,
the past has a certain weight to it. What has gone on
before sets limits to what is possible in the present,
even if it does not so limit the future. Where alienation
characterized previous relationships, that alienation
affects emerging experiences. Yet even where
institutionalized patterns of relationships express
justice and the common good, over time such
institutionalized relationships have the potential to
become alienating.

The process political ethic of Douglas Sturm has
enormous potential for Christian political ethics. We
have here the foundations for an adequate conception of
political democracy grounded in a deeply reflective
Christian theological ethic. What is needed in terms of

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our inquiry is: 1) a more fully developed dialogue with
other theological ethicists to clarify and deepen the
position offered here; 2) conceptual clarifications, e.g.,
the relationship between justice and the common good and
the relationship between the public and the political; and
3) elaboration upon the normative conception of democracy
offered, fleshing out some of the implications of this
conception for organizing public life. Our final chapter
will be dedicated to some of these tasks. Before we get
there, however, we need to consider the thought of the one
person without whom any accounting of recent Christian
theological-ethical treatments of democracy would be
incomplete, Reinhold Niebuhr.

CHAPTER VII

REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S
CHRISTIAN REALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Any discussion of recent Christian ethical

reflection on political democracy would be incomplete

without a discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr stands

as one of the preeminent Christian social ethicists of the

twentieth century.

> He, more so perhaps than any other thinker of the
> recent past, is felt to have invested the great themes
> of Christian theology with a strange kind of relevance
> to the political and intellectual ferment of the
> modern period.[1]

Even those who consider Niebuhr an "apologist of power"

recognize his importance as a Christian ethicist.[2]

Niebuhr's work in Christian social and political ethics

includes a work devoted to political democracy, The

Children of Light and the Children of Darkness. Not only

do we have in Niebuhr a significant figure in Christian

political ethics, but we have one of the few who have

given explicit, and relatively systematic, attention to

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[1]Nathan A. Scott, "Introduction," in The Legacy of
Reinhold Niebuhr, ed. Nathan A. Scott (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1974), ix-x.

[2]Bill Kellerman, "Apologist of Power: The Long
Shadow of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism,"
Sojourners 16, #3 (March, 1987), 14-20.

political democracy in book-length form. Though Niebuhr
gives significant attention to ethical reflection on
political democracy he never explicitly addresses the
issues between majoritarian and minoritarian models of
democracy. Before we consider that issue, however, we
need to explore the overall theological-ethical context
which frames Niebuhr's discussion of democracy. We begin
this exploration with a discussion of Christian "political
realism." We then examine Niebuhr's basic theological-
ethical stance, moving from there to an examination of his
more specific Christian political ethic. From there, we
return to the issue of political democracy. Finally, we
will offer some assessment of Niebuhr's Christian realist
ethic of democracy.

Christian Political Realism

As we have done with each of the ethicists
previously considered, we will locate Niebuhr's Christian
ethic within a broader thematic stream. The broader
stream in which we locate Niebuhr is that of "Christian
realism." One finds Niebuhr's self-identification as a
Christian realist scattered through-out his writings.
Locating Niebuhr's ethic within the Christian realist
stream tells us little without exploring the meaning of
Christian realism. Niebuhr offers one characterization of
realism in Christian, and other, political-ethical thought
in the following passage:

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In political and moral theory "realism" denotes the disposition to take all factors in a social and political situation, which offer resistance to established norms, into account, particularly the factors of self-interest and power.[3]

Niebuhr does not draw a sharp distinction, here, between Christian realism and other forms of political realism. We are secure, then, in turning to a Niebuhr-influenced political theorist, Hans Morgenthau, for further clarification of the meaning of political realism, clarification that Niebuhr himself does not offer in such compact form. Niebuhr considers Morgenthau "the most brilliant and authoritative political realist."[4] While Niebuhr questions whether Morgenthau's realism might not obscure a residual creativity in human rationality, he does not doubt his qualifications as an authority on "realism."[5] Morgenthau's thought, then, provides an excellent starting point for delimiting the boundaries of political realism.

Morgenthau's discussion of political realism in Politics Among Nations describes it in terms of six

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[3]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," in Christian Realism and Political Problems (New York: Scribner's, 1953), 119.

[4]Niebuhr, Man's Nature and His Communities (New York: Scribner's, 1965; reprint Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 53.

[5]Ibid., 56.

fundamental principles.[6] 1) "Politics... is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature." Morgenthau states this point more adequately when he says that a theory of politics must test itself against both reason and experience.[7] In other words, the "realism" of political realism is tested in the crucible of human experience and reasoning about that experience. 2) The concept of interest, defined in terms of power, provides the main signpost by which the political realm is understood. Political realism draws a sharp distinction between the desirable and the possible as it focuses on interest and power.[8] 3) Both interest and power have historically contingent elements to them. While power, for example, is always defined as that which helps establish and maintain the control of one person over another, the precise content of power varies.[9] Each of these principles demonstrates that political realism attempts to be deeply aware of the nature of persons and of the contingencies of history in which persons are embedded. It finds that the concepts of interest and power helpfully illumine the nature of the political life.

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[6]Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1973).

[7]Ibid., 4.

[8]Ibid., 5, 7.

[9]Ibid., 8-9.

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In its awareness of the nature of persons and of history, political realism does not neglect moral concerns.   4) "Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action."

> It is also aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action.... Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place.[10]

The political ethic of Morgenthau's political realism considers "prudence," i.e. "the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions," a primary moral principle and virtue. The political consequences of seemingly moral actions must be considered carefully.[11] 5) No nation, and by extension no group or person, has a perfect corner on moral goodness.[12] Pure interest can cloak itself in moral garb, thus one always needs to be aware of the possibility of moral pretension.   6) The final principle by which Morgenthau defines political realism is that this perspective represents a distinctive intellectual and moral attitude toward political matters, one which sees the political sphere as distinct from other spheres of human life and not amenable to being subsumed within other aspects of human life.[13] Interest and power are the key concepts for understanding this realm of human

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[10]Ibid., 10.

[11]Ibid., 10-11.

[12]Ibid., 11.

[13]Ibid., 11-12.

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life. Any application of moral principles to political life ought to begin with a recognition of these concepts, and of the concrete circumstances in which people live, work and shape their political life.

Niebuhr may object to some aspects of Morgenthau's thinking, but his own political-ethical thought has a distinct realist cast to it. The defining points of political realism identified by Morgenthau: attention to concrete circumstances; a certain tension between moral principles abstractly considered and the requirements of political life; the significance of power and interest in human affairs; and an awareness of moral pretension; tend to be shared by Niebuhr and other Christian ethicists we might call "Christian realists," such as Paul Ramsey. Their Christian realism is formed as they reflect on human experience in light of Christian theology. The roots of Niebuhr's Christian political realism are located in his basic theological-ethical stance.

Niebuhr's Theological-Ethical Stance

Reflection on the human person is at the heart of Niebuhr's basic theological-ethical stance. The titles of many of his works indicate this concern for thinking theologically about the human person. The book which many scholars consider Niebuhr's magnum opus is The Nature and Destiny of Man. Niebuhr has written about Moral Man and

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Immoral Society and about Man's Nature and His

Communities. In a 1953 essay, Niebuhr would write:

> the ultimate verification of the truth of the
> Christian faith depends upon the ability of our faith
> to illumine everything which pertains to the realm of
> personality, whether human or divine.[14]

Niebuhr's own focus was on the human personality and its

existence within history and society. His reflections

about the nature of God form an essential background to

his understanding of the human, but such reflection

clearly remains in the background.

For Niebuhr,

> the Christian view of human nature is involved in the
> paradox of claiming a higher stature for man and of
> taking a more serious view of his evil than other
> anthropology.[15]

This is a nice summary of Niebuhr's view of the human, and

reveals an important characteristic of much of Niebuhr's

work, i.e., its polemical context. Niebuhr often wrote

not simply to explain his own position, but to contrast it

with other positions he deemed inadequate. This leads

him, on occasion, to overemphasize certain aspects of his

position to the neglect of others.

Niebuhr views the human person in three dimensions:

1) the human as in the image of God, the higher stature of

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[14]Niebuhr, "The God of History," (1953) in A Niebuhr Reader, ed. Charles C. Brown, 16-17.

[15]Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Scribner's, 1949), I: 18.

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human nature; 2) the human as finite; and 3) the human as sinner.[16] In Niebuhr's Christian anthropology "man is... a created and finite existence in both body and spirit." The human, as a unity of body and spirit, is part of God's good creation.[17] The human is created in the image of God which is "an orientation of man toward God," and of "a capacity for indeterminate self-transcendence." Human self-transcendence is located in human freedom - in a capacity for self-determination and in the ability of persons to make not only individual choices but also the choice of one's total end.[18] Niebuhr argues that in their self-transcendence, humans recognize that they cannot be the center of their own existence. Human persons are unable "to construct a world of meaning without finding a source and key to the structure of meaning which transcends the world beyond [their] own capacity to transcend it."[19] Herein lie the roots of religion.

The human is not merely free, not merely a being with the capacity to ask about the meaning of existence and make choices about that meaning, the human is also a finite creature. Part of this finitude lies in the fact that the human cannot simply construct the principle of meaning for human life. The human is part of the world of

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[16]Ibid., I: 150. [17]Ibid., I: 16.

[18]Ibid., I: 153, 163. [19]Ibid., II: 26, I: 164.

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"finite, dependent, contingent existence." Niebuhr argues that this world cannot be considered evil simply on the basis of finitude. "The created world is a good world, for God created it." Even with the capacity for self-transcendence, the human self is always the finite self, anxious for its own life.[20] Such anxiety serves as the precondition for human sin.

The human person, created in the image of God, both free and finite, ought to find her or his true norm in the character of God, while not aspiring to be God. The character of God is revealed most completely in Christ.[21] We explore Niebuhr's view of Christ as the revelation of God, both because it helps round out Niebuhr's view of the human and because it is an important source of the norm of love.

The importance of Christ for Niebuhr's basic theological-ethical stance is evident in the following:

> The Christian faith affirms that the same Christ who discloses the sovereignty of God over history is also the perfect norm of human nature.[22]

Niebuhr's understanding of Christ is focused on the Cross. The Cross of Christ discloses God's love, the involvement of that love in history, and human perfection as

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[20]Ibid., I: 167, 169, 170.

[21]Ibid., I: 163-166.

[22]Ibid., II: 68.

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sacrificial love. The perfection of sacrificial love transcends history; it is not justified within history.[23] Sin is the opposite of love. The Christ who defines the nature of love is normative for all persons, not just for Christians. Nonchristian persons may experience and embody the norm of Christ. Niebuhr once noted that "a 'hidden Christ' operates in history."[24]

Sin provides an antithesis to love, and Niebuhr takes the reality of human sin very seriously. Sin is pervasive in human life, in both personal and social life. "Self-interest"," pride", "self-centeredness" serve as the primary designations of human sin. Thus the Christian Realist attention to the fact and force of self-interest in human life is a primary way of taking human sin seriously.

The fact that the human being is both free and finite serves as the condition for sin.

> Man is insecure and involved in natural contingency;
> he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will-to-power
> which overreaches the limits of human
> creatureliness.... He assumes that he can gradually
> transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes
> identical with universal mind.[25]

Such pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation. Sin is thus a rebellion against God, who

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[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., II: 109, n.6.

[25]Ibid., I: 178-179.

created the world. In its social and moral dimensions, sin is injustice.[26] Sin can also take the form of "sensuality," though there is ambivalence about whether or not to regard this as a distinctive form of sin. Niebuhr argues both that sensuality is a denial of the human capacity for transcendence, and that it can be considered a form of pride.[27] However, Niebuhr is clear that the sin of pride and self-love is more primary in Christian thinking.[28]

Sin is so pervasive because it arises out of the very nature of the human person as free and finite, and the anxiety which inevitably follows from this condition. The ideal possibility posited by Christian faith is that faith in God's love would overcome human anxiety and insecurity. Human creativity would flow from the condition of anxiety, rather than sin.[29] Anxiety is inevitable; sin is inevitable but not necessary.[30] Though all have sinned, such sin does not erase every trace of the essential nature, character or structure of being human.

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[26]Ibid., I: 179.

[27]Ibid., I: 185-186, 228-240.

[28]Ibid., I: 228.

[29]Ibid., I: 182-185.

[30]Ibid., I: 150.

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The sin of pride can take different forms in human life, e.g., pride of power, pride of knowledge, pride of self-righteousness, and spiritual pride.[31] Niebuhr also distinguishes between the sinful pride of individuals and the sinful pride of groups. "The group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual."[32] This is a primary theme of Niebuhr's earlier work, Moral Man and Immoral Society, which he thought might have been renamed "The Not So Moral Man in His Less Moral Communities."[33] Each type of pride can itself take a number of more concrete forms. Some of Niebuhr's most powerful and insightful work is his analysis of human action, the action of individuals and groups, and the detection of human sin, illusion and pretension in such action.

Sin, pride and sensuality, is the opposite of love. The sin of pride is synonymous with sinful self-love.[34] Anxiety, arising out of the fact that the human person is finite and free, is the internal pre-condition for sin. However, "the qualitative possibility of human life is its obedient subjection to the will of God."[35] This

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[31]Ibid., I: 188.

[32]Ibid., I: 208.

[33]Niebuhr, Man's Nature,15.

[34]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I: 203-206.

[35]Ibid., I: 251.

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possibility represents the highest realization of the human self. Sin represents a lack of faith in God's love demonstrated in the unwillingness of human persons to subject themselves to the loving will of God. This lack of trust in God involves "excessive and inordinate love of self."[36] This inordinate self love is in opposition to the sacrificial love disclosed in Christ to be the highest possibility for human life.

Niebuhr argues that all persons have sinned. He refers to this as "the equality of sin." At the same time, he distinguishes between the equality of sin and the "inequality of guilt." That interesting phrase simply means that even though all have sinned, relative judgements can and should be made between more and less harm caused by sin.[37] "Guilt is the actual consequence of sin, the actual corruption of the plan of creation and providence in the historical world."[38] Certain actions or patterns of action create more harm and havoc than others, and thus we must speak of inequalities of guilt. Those with power, position, knowledge and religious standing have to be particularly careful, for persons with such social standing have the potential to create more harm

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[36]Ibid., I: 252.

[37]Ibid., I: 220.

[38]Ibid., I: 222.

than the poor and outcast.[39] The distinction between the equality of sin and the inequality of guilt makes relative moral judgements possible and necessary.

Niebuhr's basic theological-ethical stance is defined not only by his extensively developed theological anthropology, but also by the moral norms which are central to this stance. The central norm of Niebuhr's ethic is love. "The love of Christ, His disinterested and sacrificial agape" represents "the highest possibility of human existence."[40] Jesus Christ serves as the source for understanding the ultimate norm of love. "The cross symbolizes the perfection of agape which transcends all particular norms of justice and mutuality in history." Sacrificial love, or pure love, is defined as self-giving love motivated by conformity to the will of God.[41] Pure Christian love, as lived and taught by Jesus Christ, is a love which is always ready to give of itself for the other. It represents a completion of "mutual love," which "seeks to relate life to life from the standpoint of the self and for the sake of the self's own happiness."[42] Niebuhr's understanding of agape love has many affinities with Yoder's ethic.

One aspect of Niebuhr's "realism" is evident when he argues that the ethic of agape is not directly applicable

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[39]Ibid., I: 222. [40]Ibid., II: 71.

[41]Ibid., II: 74, 84. [42]Ibid., II: 82.

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to the lives of even Christian people. This is a sharp

contrast with Yoder's ethic. Niebuhr argues that

sacrificial love is not a simple historical possibility

because of the pervasive reality of human sin. "Sinful

egoism makes all historical harmonies of interest partial

and incomplete.[43] Sacrificial love, or agape, on the

other hand, represents an ultimate and final harmony of

life with life. This ultimate harmony represents the

perfect love of the Kingdom of God. Love is also not a

historical possibility because it cannot be historically

justified, in light of human sin. Put another way, sac-

rificial love provides an inadequate basis for human

social existence under the conditions of sin.[44]

While sacrificial love is not directly and

immediately applicable to human historical existence, the

norm of mutual love is.

> From the standpoint of history, mutual love is the
> highest good. Only in mutual love, in which the
> concern of one person for the interests of another
> prompts and elicits a reciprocal affection, are the
> social demands of historical existence satisfied.[45]

Nevertheless, one cannot simply ignore sacrificial love.

Mutual and reciprocal relationships are impossible if the

self is dominated by fear that its efforts toward

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[43]Ibid., II: 74.

[44]Ibid., II: 81, 83, 246-247.

[45]Ibid., II: 68-69.

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mutuality might not be reciprocated by others. "Mutuality is not a possible achievement if it is made the intention and goal of any action. Sacrificial love is thus paradoxically related to mutual love."[46] We will explore more fully the nature of sacrificial love as an "impossible possibility" as we turn toward our examination of Niebuhr's political ethic.[47]

Niebuhr's Realist Political Ethic

Niebuhr's basic theological-ethical stance focuses on a theology of the human, a view of sin, and the norm of love for human life. As we move to Niebuhr's political ethic we find the basic stance emerging in new ways. We begin our exploration of this political ethic by exploring Niebuhr's conception of the Kingdom of God.

Niebuhr's conception of the Kingdom of God corresponds to his understanding of sacrificial love, i.e., the Kingdom of God means the complete reign of perfect love where an ultimate and final harmony of life with life is achieved. The highest unity of life with life "is a harmony of love in which the self relates itself in its freedom to other selves in their freedom under the will of God."[48]

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[46]Ibid., II: 69.

[47]Ibid., II: 76.

[48]Ibid., II: 95.

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As with sacrificial love, the norm of the Kingdom of
God remains an "impossible possibility."

> There are no limits to be set in history for the
> achievement of more universal brotherhood, for the
> development of more perfect and more inclusive mutual
> relations.[49]

With this in mind, Niebuhr argues that the "agape of the
Kingdom of God" should be seen "as a resource for infinite
developments towards a more perfect brotherhood in
history."[50] The norm of the Kingdom of God lures us on to
more adequate achievements of "brotherhood," of harmon-
izing life with life under the conditions of history, and
of justice.

The Christian moral norms of love and the Kingdom of
God cannot be directly applied to human life within
history, particularly to socio-political life. The idea
of the harmony of life with life that is included in each
of these concepts, however, serves as the foundation for
identifying other moral norms more directly applicable to
human social and political life, norms of mutual love and
justice. For Niebuhr, "social morality must seek the best
possible harmony of life with life, given the egoism of
man."[51] A historically relevant morality thus seeks to
achieve as much harmony as is possible, given the

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[49]Ibid., II: 85.

[50]Ibid., II: 85.

[51]Ibid., II: 83.

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pervasiveness of human sin, of inordinate self-love. The
basis for achieving such harmony must be different from
self-giving love.

> It is not even right to insist that every action of
> the Christian must conform to agape, rather than to
> the norms of relative justice and mutual love by which
> life is maintained and conflicting interests are
> arbitrated in history. For as soon as the life and
> interests of others than the agent are involved in an
> action or policy, the sacrifice of those interests
> ceases to be "self-sacrifice." It may actually become
> an unjust betrayal of their interests.[52]

The norms of mutual love and justice are formulated
in the tension between the lure of harmony represented by
the Kingdom of God and the reality of sin and conflicting
interests.

Niebuhr argues that conflict is an inevitable aspect
of human existence.[53] He never clearly distinguishes
between types of conflict, e.g., conflicting claims and
social conflict.[54] There may exist a conflict between
claims that does not erupt into social conflict, though it
might. On the other hand, social conflict, as defined by
Lewis Coser arises from conflicting interests.[55] For

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[52]Ibid., II: 88.

[53]Niebuhr, <u>Moral Man and Immoral Society</u> (New York:
Scribner's, 1932), xx.

[54]Joel Feinberg, <u>Social Philosophy</u> (Englewood
Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), Ch. 5, and Lewis Coser,
<u>The Functions of Social Conflict</u> (New York: The Free
Press, 1956).

[55]Coser, 8.

Niebuhr, the roots of conflict are located in the egoism of human sin. Human egoism causes persons to overestimate the importance of their own interests and underestimate the importance of the interests of others, creating the conditions for social conflict.[56] Yet human beings retain a capacity to consider the interests of others. Still, when interests conflict, "relations of mutual dependence are destroyed."[57] For Niebuhr, human beings are aware "that life ought not to be lived at cross purposes, that conflict within the self and between the self and others, is evil."[58]

Niebuhr is arguing, then, that conflict arises out of human sin and that it is harmful and evil. Nevertheless, conflict is inevitable, and an adequate social ethic must take account of this fact of history. Within the processes of history, Niebuhr sees two ways in which conflicts are generally settled. Most conflicts are adjudicated by superior authority and power, most often without the use of force.[59] However, other adjustments of interest to interest that synthesize conflicting interests, without the presence of coercion, are also

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[56]Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, xx, xxiii-xxiv. Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, II: 251-252.

[57]Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, II: 249, 265.

[58]Ibid., II: 81-82.

[59]Ibid., II: 259.

possible. Justice represents "the best possible harmony

within the conditions created by human egoism."[60]

In Niebuhr's political ethic, justice serves as the

primary normative principle. Niebuhr describes the

guiding conviction of his Christian realist political

ethic as a conviction that:

> a realist conception of human nature should be made
> the servant of an ethic of progressive justice and
> should not be made into a bastion of conservativism,
> particularly a conservativism which defends unjust
> privileges.[61]

Justice is described in a number of ways, in

addition to the idea of the best possible harmony.

Justice involves giving "each one his due."[62] It also

"requires discriminate judgements between conflicting

claims," including "the claims of the self."[63] Equality

and liberty, are viewed as "the regulative principles of

justice."[64] Justice, by taking account of the inevitable

conflicts within historical existence, can serve as a norm

for political life within history. By including such

claims, however, justice must always be less than love.

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[60]Ibid., II: 252.

[61]Niebuhr, Man's Nature, 16.

[62]Niebuhr, "The Spirit of Justice" (1950), in Love
and Justice, ed. D.B. Robertson (Phiadelphia: Westminster
Press, 1957; reprint, Glouster, MA: Peter Smith, 1976),
25.

[63]Niebuhr, "Justice and Love," (1950) in Love and
Justice, 28.

[64]Niebuhr, Man's Nature, 18.

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Irresponsible power poses the greatest threat to justice and thus a balance of power is required to maintain justice.[65] In the midst of the struggle to achieve such a balance of power, justice remains only provisionally defined, and any such definition retains historically contingent elements.[66] Justice can always be more adequately embodied and more adequately understood, and the Christian remains under "obligations to realize justice in indeterminate degrees."

> There are no limits to be set in history for the achievement of more universal brotherhood, for the development of more perfect and more inclusive mutual relations.[67]

Niebuhr's basic stance on the relation between love and justice is that justice is something less than love, though no less significant for the Christian moral life in history, i.e., under the conditions of sin. All realizations of justice in history "contain contradictions to, as well as approximations of, the ideal of love."[68] Yet, without the lure of the norm of love, justice would

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[65]Niebuhr, _The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness_ (New York: Scribner's, 1944), xiv. Niebuhr, _Nature and Destiny_, II: 265.

[66]Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Natural Law" (1940), in _Love and Justice_, 50. Niebuhr, _Nature and Destiny_, II: 253.

[67]Niebuhr, _Nature and Destiny_, II: 246, 85.

[68]Ibid., 246-247.

degenerate into something less than itself.[69] Niebuhr does not consistently bifurcate these two norms, however. He writes that justice may be an expression of love "insofar as the love of the neighbor requires a calculation of competitive claims when there is more than one neighbor."[70] Nevertheless, Niebuhr's most characteristic position can be summed up in the following passage: "love as a substitute for justice is odious, but love as a supplement to justice is an absolute necessity."[71]

Justice, and its relationship to the perfect love of the Kingdom of God, provides the normative center for further political-ethical reflection. Niebuhr's Christian theological-political ethic seeks to apply the norm of justice in a world wrought with sin (self-interest). Human persons and groups, seeking their self-interest, strive to enhance their ability to do so by seeking greater power. Countervailing power must be utilized to keep the social conflicts of power against power in check. In the midst of these complexities and difficulties, the Christian remains obligated to pursue justice.

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[69]Niebuhr, "Justice and Love," 28.

[70]Niebuhr, "The Christian Faith and the Economic Life of Liberal Society" (1953), in Faith and Politics, ed. Ronald H. Stone (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 147.

[71]Niebuhr, "The Gospel in Future America" (1958), in A Niebuhr Reader, 50.

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Our discussion of Niebuhr's view of justice has introduced the concept of power. Power can take a variety of forms, from the power of reason to that of pure physical force.[72] Niebuhr's understanding of all types of power is deeply rooted in his view of sin. Power is both dangerous and necessary. Disproportionate power leads to injustice.

> Social life, when not consciously managed and manipulated, does not develop perfect equilibria of power. Its capricious disproportions of power generate various forms of domination and enslavement.... There must be an organizing centre within a given field of social vitalities.[73]

While social life needs an organizing center to help "manipulate" and channel social conflicts of power against power, such an organizing center will be tempted to misuse its power. Government, which provides the primary organizing center of power in society, "would, if its pretensions are not checked, generate imperial impulses of its own towards the community."[74]

Niebuhr's political ethic does not simply rest on the principle of justice, operative in the midst of conflicting claims and powers. Order, community, freedom, equality, and toleration are other significant normative concepts. The concept of "order" is closely related to the discussion of justice and power. Niebuhr

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[72]Niebuhr, _Nature and Destiny_, II: 260-264.

[73]Ibid., II: 266. [74]Ibid., II: 267.

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distinguishes the principles and rules of justice from the structures of justice, i.e., those systems, organizations and mechanisms in society that imperfectly embody and make historically concrete the principles and rules of justice. The harmony attained within human communities is a product of both operative normative conceptions and the operation of power.[75] Niebuhr distinguishes between social power as an organizing power and social power as an equilibrium of power. Social powers do not automatically attain a harmonious equilibrium if left to themselves. Unorganized social powers, left to themselves, threaten society with anarchy and the attendant domination of some over others.[76] An organizing center of power is needed, and this takes the form of government, which has the power to "subdue recalcitrance."[77] Justice, as a harmonious balance of interests and vitalities under the conditions of sin, must be ordered justice, though justice remains the senior partner in this compound norm.[78] The quality of order in any society depends upon the quality of the balance between the organization of power and the equilibrium of power attained.[79] One of the most

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[75]Ibid., II: 256-257.   [76]Ibid., II: 258, 265.

[77]Niebuhr, _Children of Light_, 44, 67.

[78]Niebuhr, _The Structures of Nations and Empires_ (New York: Scribner's, 1959), 4-5.

[79]Niebuhr, _Nature and Destiny_, II: 256-258.

significant contributions Niebuhr makes to Christian
political ethics is his emphasis on the importance of the
principle of order and his forthright acknowledgment of
the necessity for using power in human social and
political life.

The principle of ordered justice is a principle for
human communities. "Community," while sometimes used
descriptively, also has normative connotations in
Niebuhr's ethic. Community is necessary for proper human
life.[80]

> The individual's dependence upon the community for the
> foundation upon which the pinnacle of his uniqueness
> stands... is matched by his need of the community as
> the partial end, justification and fulfillment of his
> existence.[81]

The maintenance of any community entails a signif-
icant measure of cohesiveness between the individuals and
groups within that community. Such cohesiveness derives,
in part, from "natural" sources, e.g., common language,
shared history and traditions, and from an ethos of shared
purpose.[82] Coercion also has a role to play in the
maintenance of a cohesive community.[83]

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[80]Ibid., II: 244.

[81]Niebuhr, Children of Light, 55.

[82]Ibid., 53-54. Niebuhr, Man's Nature, Ch. 2.
Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul E. Sigmund, The Democratic
Experience (New York: Praeger, 1969), 7.

[83]Niebuhr, Moral Man, 175. Niebuhr, Nature and
Destiny, II: 89, 266-267. Niebuhr, Children of Light, 67.

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Niebuhr's ideal for social morality, applicable
within human history is an ordered harmony based on
justice. Justice includes liberty and equality as its two
"regulative principles." If justice involves giving each
person her or his due, then a part of what is due each
person is some measure of freedom and some recognition of
equality. The relative importance Niebuhr gives to
freedom, as a principle of justice, is rooted in his view
of the self. The human person is essentially free and
thus transcends any historical political community.
Niebuhr argues that the self,

> while it needs the community for its fulfillment...
> rises indeterminately above and beyond the community
> to express and project its unique talents, ambitions,
> and its search for fulfillment, exercising its reason,
> imagination, and any form of cultural competence to
> search for meanings and purposes which may or may not
> be relevant to the immediate political purposes of
> this community.[84]

However, in this same work, Niebuhr argues against
"individualistic" and "libertarian" interpretations of
democracy, based on misunderstandings of freedom in
relation to social realities.[85] Nevertheless, freedom is
an important aspect of Niebuhr's political ethic. In
fact, he grew in his appreciation both of freedom as a
moral principle of justice and of the concrete embodiments

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[84]Niebuhr and Sigmund, 76.

[85]Ibid., 7-8.

of freedom within democratic governments.[86] Yet Niebuhr

consistently views freedom as the freedom necessary to,

and consistent with, order and justice.

Equality is the other regulative principle of
justice.

> Equality as a pinnacle of the ideal of justice
> implicitly points towards love as the final norm of
> justice; for equal justice is the approximation of
> brotherhood under the conditions of sin. A higher
> justice always means a more equal justice.[87]

While society should strive to realize a more equal

justice, Niebuhr argues that the need for different social

functions to be performed means that complete equality is

impossible. He goes on to argue that those whose social

function gives them some special privilege tend to

emphasize the impossibility of achieving complete equal-

ity, while those who have less social power and status

tend to emphasize the absolute importance of equality for

justice. For Niebuhr, this illustrates the "inevitable

ideological taint" in the application of generally valid

socio-moral principles.[88] In other words, human sin

expresses itself, in part, through misuse of moral

principles. While some of our other ethicists have made a

similar point, Niebuhr does a more adequate job of

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[86]Harlan Beckley, <u>Passion for Justice</u> (Louisville:
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 286-288, 313-315.

[87]Niebuhr, <u>Nature and Destiny</u>, II: 254.

[88]Ibid., II: 254-255.

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describing this phenomenon in depth and in giving it an
important place in his thinking.

While these various normative concepts and
principles are given certain priorities, the more exact
emphasis given each in any historical situation is, to use
one of Niebuhr's favorite terms, "indeterminate."
Christian realism is a form of Christian pragmatism,
according to Niebuhr, and such a pragmatism

> becomes increasingly aware of the contingent
> circumstances of history which determine how much or
> how little it is necessary to emphasize the various
> regulative principles of justice, equality and
> liberty, security of the community or the freedom of
> the individual, the order of the integral community
> and, as is now increasingly the case, the peace of the
> world community.[89]

Thus a community needs processes whereby it can
determine the more exact mixture of these various
normative elements needed in any particular context, and
policies concomitant with this mixture. The distinguish-
ing characteristic of such processes should be tolerance.
Niebuhr remains justly famous for his extended discussions
of the importance of tolerance in the political process.[90]
This need for tolerance is rooted in views of human fin-
itude and the pervasiveness of human sin. Human knowledge
of the truth is always subject "not merely to the finite

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[89]Niebuhr, "Development of a Social Ethic in the
Ecumenical Movement" (1963), in Faith and Politics, 177.

[90]Niebuhr, Children of Light, Ch. 4. Niebuhr,
Nature and Destiny, II: Ch. 8.

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limits of the mind but to the play of passion and interest which human vitalities introduce into the process."[91] The test of whether or not persons comprehend this Christian attitude toward truth is found in toleration, which involves both the ability to hold vital convictions which lead to action, and the capacity to tolerate and even entertain views other than one's own without rancor.[92] Niebuhr connects his Christian view of toleration with political life. "Religious humility is in perfect accord with the presuppositions of a democratic society."[93]

Do all the normative principles and concepts in Niebuhr's political ethic yield a conception of the common good? We can identify an eschatological common good in Niebuhr's thought, namely his vision of the Kingdom of God in which perfect love and brotherhood overcome all the conflicts within the self, between the self and others, and between all person and God. This "common good" remains an impossible possibility. Can we find in Niebuhr any references to the idea of the common good as a historically relevant political-moral principle?

In scouring Niebuhr's work, we find few explicit references to "the common good." In one description of the human situation, Niebuhr writes about "the profoundly

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[91]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 214.

[92]Ibid., II: 219, 236.

[93]Niebuhr, Children of Light, 135, 151.

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idolatrous tendency in the heart of man, the tendency to
set himself up as God and to defy the common good."[94] Yet
he also writes that democratic debate reveals that "a
sense of the common good" resides in all classes in
society.[95] However, a conceptualization of the common
good is never developed.

More characteristically, Niebuhr invokes terms that
might be considered functional equivalents of the common
good, such as the "larger good" or "the highest possible
social end." He uses the concept of "the general welfare"
on a few occasions.[96] In an illuminating passage, Niebuhr
argues that a healthy community needs groups that, while
devoted to their own welfare, ought to exhibit concern for
the general welfare. He goes on to write that, "one must
leave the concept of 'general welfare' somewhat vague"
because, in some respects, the concept must include
concern for the world community.[97] Niebuhr not only
leaves his notion of the general welfare vague, he does
not use it with any frequency.

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[94]Niebuhr, "The Godly and the Godless" (1948), in
Essays in Applied Christianity, ed. D.B. Robertson (New
York: Meridian Books, 1959), 227.

[95]Niebuhr, Man's Nature, 51.

[96]Ibid., 53. Niebuhr, "Barthianism and the Kingdom"
(1931) in Essays, 149. Niebuhr, "The Republican Victory"
(1952) in Love and Justice, 63.

[97]Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Economic Life," in
Faith and Politics, 155.

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Given the scant attention Niebuhr gives even to concepts like "the general welfare," we could conclude, with Beckley, that while Niebuhr does have a social ideal, it is not historically applicable.[98] Niebuhr argues that persons have an obligation to realize truth and goodness in history.[99] Yet he wants to avoid giving persons any reasons for moral complacency. Though the possibilities for historical achievements of goodness are indeterminate, they are not completely so. It is possible to construct a Niebuhrian conception of the common good, a social ideal, that is historically relevant and yet never fully realizable. We might construct such a conception, using Niebuhr's normative concerns, as follows: The common good is represented by a political community, conscious of itself as a community, seeking an ordered justice and preserving the freedom compatible with, and necessary to, such an ordered justice. Further, the processes by which the community defines and redefines ordered justice and determines the more specific policies of that ordered justice are characterized by tolerance. The elements which would comprise this vision of the common good are: justice, order, community, freedom, and tolerance.[100]

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[98]Beckley, 351.

[99]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 213.

[100]Niebuhr, "Development of a Social Ethic," 177.

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A Niebuhrian conception of the common good would
need to give a distinct priority to justice. In this it
would agree with Robert Dahl who notes, "virtually every
account of the common good specifies justice as one of the
most crucial common goods."[101] For Niebuhr, justice is
not merely one among many crucial elements of any common
good, it is the most crucial element, though the other
elements identified are also important and necessary.
Free governments "must validate themselves as instruments
of justice."[102] In reading Niebuhr, one must conclude
that justice provides the chief cornerstone of his
theologically-rooted political ethic. Thus a Niebuhrian
conception of the common good would have to give justice
center stage. The potential advantages of developing a
Niebuhrian concept of the common good will be discussed in
our assessment of his ethic.

Niebuhr's Ethic for Political Democracy

The normative principles and concepts which form
Niebuhr's political ethic are intended to guide political
life within history. Political morality brings to light
the abstract and general conditions necessary to achieve a
tolerable social harmony within the limits of history,
where sin and self-interest are pervasive. Political

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[101]Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics, 303.

[102]Niebuhr and Sigmund, 7.

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morality must both try to subvert self-interest and harness it to achieve such harmony.[103] Politics, while it may involve more than government, must have some reference to the state and government.

For Niebuhr, the state or government is "the organ of the community in regulating its common concerns."[104] As such, it is a divine ordinance.[105] Niebuhr's view of the state often emphasizes regulating the community by restraining groups and persons within it. Yet to acknowledge only that aspect of his position is insufficient.

> Though it is true that government must have the power
> to subdue recalcitrance, it also has a more positive
> function. It must guide, direct, deflect and
> rechannel conflicting and competing forces in a
> community in the interest of a higher order. It must
> provide instruments for the expression of the
> individual's sense of obligation to the community as
> well as weapons against the individuals anti-social
> lusts and ambitions.[106]

Niebuhr writes about the duty of the political order to establish justice and the need for government power to enforce human rights.[107]

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[103]Niebuhr, Children of Light, 72-73.

[104]Niebuhr, "Our Relations to Catholicism" (1947), in Essays, 224.

[105]Niebuhr, "Church and State in America" (1941), in Essays, 87.

[106]Niebuhr, Children of Light, 44.

[107]Niebuhr and Sigmund, 7. Niebuhr, Man's Nature, 75.

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We could term Niebuhr's view of the state or govern-
ment a mixed view. The state provides necessary res-
traints to sin and its social expression, while, at the
same time, seeking to channel self-interest, along with
other human energies in positive ways, e.g., toward
justice and a higher order. Yet the very power which the
state uses to accomplish these functions might become
inordinate. Niebuhr argues that all governments in
history have made pretentious claims for themselves.
Furthermore, those who obtain the power to control
government have used that power to restrain their
opposition, while pursuing their own limited ends in
the name of the state.[108]

With this view of the state in mind, we can go on to
ask about Niebuhr's conception and evaluation of political
democracy. Our task here is complicated by Niebuhr's
shifting positions on democracy. In Moral Man and Immoral
Society, he expressed a dim view of democratic processes
in light of the power of economic interests to shape
political opinions.[109] However, Niebuhr grew to
appreciate the resources and potential of political

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[108]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 267-268.

[109]Niebuhr, Moral Man, 4-6.

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democracy.[110] Behind these differing evaluations of democracy, one detects a thematic continuity. In different phases of his thinking about democracy, Niebuhr understands democracy in terms of balancing powers within society.[111] What seems to have changed is Niebuhr's views on the nature and expressions of power and on the real possibilities of democracy to balance power in the interest of justice.[112] .

Thus, while Niebuhr never completely rejected the bases for his earlier criticism of political democracy, he came to appreciate the achievements and potential of democracy. This new appreciation of democracy can be found in his writings beginning with The Nature and Destiny of Man. The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, a work in political philosophy with deep roots in the theology of The Nature and Destiny of Man, represents the focal point for Niebuhr's mature thinking on democracy.[113] That work contains his well-known Christian Realist meditation on democracy: "Man's capacity

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[110]Beckley, 220-222, 325-332. Arthur Schlesinger, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in American Political Thought and Life," in Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political Thought, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 145, 150.

[111]Schlesinger, 145, 150.

[112]Beckley, 325-332.

[113]Charles C. Brown, Reinhold Niebuhr and His Age (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1992), 114-118.

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for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."[114] Our discussion of Niebuhr's conception of democracy will focus on his works from <u>Nature and Destiny</u> on.

In writing about political democracy, Niebuhr seems to be discussing a normative concept. Nevertheless, Niebuhr's norm, being a norm adequate to historical life, does not stray too far from his views of how democracy might work and does work when it is at its best. Niebuhr argues that the achievements of democratic societies support the view that democracy has the potential to achieve tolerably just solutions to common problems within a community. Democracies tend to more equal justice because they endow all persons with a measure of political power.[115] For Niebuhr, these characteristics, along with others to be discussed, give democratic civilization a moral legitimacy.[116]

While we have discussed a couple of the general characteristics of political democracy that Niebuhr sees as lending it moral legitimacy, we have yet to determine the place majoritarian and minoritarian concerns occupy in normative democracy. Niebuhr does not address this issue

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[114]Niebuhr, <u>Children of Light</u>, xiii.

[115]Niebuhr, <u>Nature and Destiny</u>, II: 249, 263.

[116]Niebuhr, "Our Relations with Catholicism" (1947), in <u>Essays</u>, 224.

explicitly and directly, yet a variety of passages in his writings help us address this issue in his terms. A number of passages support themes consistent with a minoritarian conception of democracy: distrust of majorities, no doubt related to his view of sin; the perceived need for political opposition in healthy political societies; a view that proper government ought to be limited; a view that free accommodation of interests has creative potential; and a view of the human as transcendent over society and history. We shall examine each theme in turn to see how it shapes Niebuhr's conception of democracy.

Niebuhr occasionally expresses a distrust of majorities.[117] Such a position reflects Niebuhr's assertion that group egoism is even more stubborn and persistent than individual egoism.[118] For Niebuhr, such distrust and scepticism toward majorities finds part- icularly strong expression in those places where he discusses issues of racial minorities.[119] Given such

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[117]Niebuhr, "The Confessions of a Tired Radical" (1928), in Love and Justice, 122. Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and the Race Problem" (1945), in Love and Justice, 126.

[118]Niebuhr, Man's Nature, 14. Niebuhr, Moral Man.

[119]See Love and Justice, II.D, and Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics, ed. Harry R. David and Robert C. Good (New York: Scribner's, 1960). These works include some of Niebuhr's occasional pieces on race relations.

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statements, we could conclude that Niebuhr would tend to support strong limits on majority governance where political majorities consistently coincide with racial, class or other such majorities.

Another group of texts tends to support a more minoritarian model of democracy, not simply out of distrust of and skepticism toward majorities, but rather out of the perception that healthy political systems require opposition. Democracy at its best "provides that no laws, ideals, structures, and systems should exist without the criticism which may disclose their ambiguous character."[120] If genuine opposition positions and criticisms are to flourish, protection must be given to political minorities. While this is not strictly a concern of minoritarian models of democracy, it can lend support to them, in conjunction with other arguments.

Directly related to the need for political opposition are those texts which argue for limits on the power of government.[121] Some of these passages even border on advocating the stricter limits on government usually argued for by minoritarian democrats. Niebuhr can argue against a too consistent regulation of economic processes

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[120]Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action" (1953), in Faith and Politics, 129-130.

[121]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 268.

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by "bureaucratic-political decisions."[122] Such passages
are linked to Niebuhr's concern that government might use
its power inordinately.

Yet another group of texts lends support to minor-
itarian conceptions of democracy. In these texts, Niebuhr
grants that a free accommodation of interests can be a
creative social force.[123] Niebuhr does not maintain a
thorough-going skepticism toward unmanaged contests of
interest against interest, power against power. He
remains concerned when the balances of power involved in
such contests become weighted too greatly toward one side
or the other. Yet if the free accommodation of interest
to interest is to have its creative effect, some
significant measure of freedom must be granted to persons
and groups. Freedom remains the bedrock moral principle
in support of minoritarian democracy.

The importance of freedom is also supported by
Niebuhr's view of the relationship between the self and
society. The self is transcendent over history and
society, and this can provide a deep theological ground-
ing for minoritarian democracy because of its implications
for the importance of socio-political freedom.[124]

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[122]Niebuhr, The Irony of American History (New York:
Scribner's, 1952), 93.

[123]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 257. Niebuhr
and Sigmund, 29.

[124]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 300.

This implicit support for minoritarian democracy is balanced by implicit support for a more majoritarian conception of democracy. In one passage, Niebuhr identifies "the democratic method of resolving social conflict" with majority rule. In another passage Niebuhr writes, "in a democratic society, there is presumably some concurrence between the will of the rulers and that of the majority."[125] That same passage, though, goes on to express a concern over "inadequate safeguards to the minority". The kind of majorities Niebuhr has in mind "must be tentative and precarious," and "may be composed from time to time by the most various alliances of groups."[126] Majoritarian democracy gives a prominent place to the rule of such shifting majorities, though it involves more than simple acceptance and justification of a majority decision-making rule. The close association between democracy and majority rule in Niebuhr's thinking opens up the possibility that Niebuhr's normative conception of democracy is not simply minoritarian.

Another group of texts which display majoritarian themes are those texts which discuss the importance of suffrage and equal voting rights.[127] The concern for

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[125]Niebuhr, Moral Man, 4. Niebuhr, Children of Light, 46.

[126]"The Commitment of the Self and the Freedom of the Mind" (1954), in On Politics, 184.

[127]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 262-263.

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equality, matched with a concern that every vote be counted equally, is one of the hallmarks of majoritarian democracy. It offers some principled support for majority rule.

A third series of texts offers some support for a majoritarian conception of democracy in their discussion of the need for organizing power relations in society. "Historical contests of power must be managed, supervised, and suppressed by the community."[128] This idea is built upon Niebuhr's more general theory of power and the structures of justice.[129] Niebuhr considers power in communal life under two rubrics, the organization of power and the equilibrium of power. The free accommodation of power to power which is part of the equilibrium of power tends to provide some support for minoritarian democracy. However, Niebuhr argues that social powers, left to themselves, tend to become unbalanced. An imbalance of power, where no one has the ability to organize power relations, exacerbates and widens social conflict. The socio-political community, if it is not to succumb to anarchy, must manage the distribution and struggle of power.

How ought the community accomplish this organization of power? Niebuhr argues that government must organize

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[128]Niebuhr, _Children of Light_, 65-66.

[129]Niebuhr, _Nature and Destiny_, II: 256-259.

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society's power struggles, yet he is concerned that the organizing power of government not itself become inordinate. By distributing political power widely, democracy provides for some check on the organizing power of society.[130] One way the political power of the people exercises some control over the government is through the power of majorities to elect persons to office.[131]

The political community must manage social conflict, but it also must be able to act in a united fashion as it seeks justice and as it acts within the community of nations. Niebuhr refers to "the required majority, necessary for common action."[132] In another passage, Niebuhr writes that the political realist "knows that the political authority which must establish the order of the community must be one."[133] The emphasis on the ability of the state to act, combined with the idea that political majorities play a prominent role in determining the direction of that action, is consistent with the concerns that support majoritarian democracy.

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[130]Ibid., II: 263.

[131]Niebuhr, "Democracy, Secularism and Christianity," in Christian Realism and Political Problems, 96.

[132]Niebuhr, "The Commitment of the Self," in On Politics, 184.

[133]Niebuhr and Sigmund, 13.

This argument gains further strength when we consider that Niebuhr's ethic provides moral justification for the justifiable use of governmental coercion in political life. A normatively adequate conception of majoritarian democracy entails some moral justification for the limited use of coercion by the government. Political minorities are expected to abide by the decisions of political majorities, even if such obedience must be enforced by the limited use of coercion. Niebuhr provides a theologically-based moral justification for the limited use of coercion.

> No society can exist without the use of coercion,
> though every intelligent society will try to reduce
> coercion to a minimum and rely upon the factor of
> mutual consent to give stability to its institutions.
> Yet it can never trust all of its citizens to accept
> necessary social arrangements voluntarily. It will
> use police force against recalcitrant and antisocial
> minorities, and it will use the threat of political
> force against a complacent and indifferent group of
> citizens which could never be relied upon to initiate
> adequate social policies upon its own accord. No
> government can wait upon voluntary action on the part
> of the privileged members of the community for an
> adequate inheritance or income tax.[134]

This passage comes from one of Niebuhr's earlier essays, and there is evidence that he came to a greater appreciation of the potential for the free accommodation of power to power and interest to interest, without coercion by an organizing center of power. Yet Niebuhr

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[134]Niebuhr, "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem" (1932), in Love and Justice, 35-36.

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never rejected his view of the necessity of coercion in political life.[135]

Finally, support for a majoritarian conception of democracy can be found in a number of texts which discuss the democratic process itself. In these passages the democratic process is characterized by shifting majorities coming to tentative decisions about the direction social policy ought to take.[136] Further, democracy involves contested elections after which "the defeated minority submits with what grace it is able to summon, and the party truce goes into effect for the general public."[137]

The mention of political parties is significant, as Niebuhr gives the topic of political parties more attention than most other theological ethicists. Democracy requires the organization of political parties, and some measure of mutual respect, or at least toleration, between them.

> Practically, "the people" can make their decisions
> only when they are confronted with specific
> alternatives. Thus modern democracies have evolved
> the organization of an alternative government which
> constantly challenges the party in power while it is

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[135]Niebuhr, Moral Man, 175. Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 257.

[136]Niebuhr, "The Commitment of the Self," in On Politics, 184.

[137]Niebuhr, "Democracy and the Party Spirit" (1954), in Love and Justice, 67.

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in office, and tries to replace it in office at the end of the term.[138]

In stable democratic regimes, party conflict is limited by a degree of mutual trust between parties. Such trust emanates from a general loyalty to the nation among the populace, as well as a general commitment to principles of justice and freedom.[139] Commitment to freedom and justice, while never consistent, always remains a possibility. Political encounters and debates in free societies are never merely contests of power and interest, but also involve "the rational engagement and enlargement of a native sympathy, a sense of justice, a residual moral integrity, and a sense of the common good in all classes of society."[140]

These characterizations of the democratic process are not strictly majoritarian. Some minoritarian theorists offer similar views of the democratic process, though these are usually accompanied by an extended discussion of the relatively restricted sphere in which government should be allowed to act. However we ought not overlook the compatibility of the view of democracy offered in these passages with the view of democracy offered

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[138]Ibid., 67, 66.

[139]Ibid., 67-68.

[140]Niebuhr's, Man's Nature, 51.

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by majoritarian democratic-political theorist E. E.
Schattschneider.

> Democracy is a competitive political system in which
> competing leaders and organizations define the
> alternatives of public policy in such a way that the
> public can participate in the decision-making process.

> Party government is good democratic doctrine because
> the parties are the special form of political
> organization adapted to the mobilization of
> majorities.[141]

Taken together, these two passages display some of

the characteristic features of a party government form of

majoritarian democracy. For Schattschneider, political

parties define policy positions from which the general

public chooses. As parties are interested in winning the

power to govern, the positions they choose must be gen-

erally responsive to public viewpoints. Elections provide

the public with the opportunity to decide which party

program best represents their own sense of where the

country ought to go. Elections are decided when one party

or another receives a majority of the votes. That party

then has the power to govern.

The compatibility between Niebuhr's texts and the

texts of a well-known majoritarian political theorist is

illuminating. Nevertheless, we must remember that other

texts in Niebuhr's writings displayed themes supportive of

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[141]E.E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People,
138. Schattschneider, Party Government, 208.

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a minoritarian conception of democracy. A number of texts
place majoritarian and minoritarian concerns side-by-
side.[142]

All these texts on political democracy, taken
together, indicate that Niebuhr balances concerns
compatible with a minoritarian conception of democracy
with concerns compatible with a majoritarian conception of
democracy. Such a position seems entirely consistent with
Niebuhr's theological ethic in which he argues for the
equality of sin and the inequality of guilt, and for a
view of persons who both have and yet do not have the
truth. Niebuhr has a remarkable capacity for trying to
balance principled positions which seem in tension with
one another. This capacity, and the depth of insight
which frequently accompanies it, is one of the reasons for
Niebuhr's stature as a Christian social ethicist. What we
are discovering is that Niebuhr's reflection on political
democracy yields a conception of democracy which seems
neither fully majoritarian nor fully minoritarian, but
must balance the concerns embodied in both. Yet we
received that same message from our examination of other
Christian positions. What important insights and
resources does Niebuhr's Christian Realist ethic offer us

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[142]Niebuhr, <u>Nature and Destiny</u>, II: 266-270.
Niebuhr, <u>Children of Light</u>, 46-47, 73. Niebuhr,
<u>Structures of Nations</u>, 54-55. Niebuhr, <u>Man's Nature</u>, 50-
51.

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as we seek to think about the place of majoritarian and
minoritarian concerns in a normatively adequate conception
of political democracy? We address this question in our
assessment of Niebuhr's work.

Assessing Niebuhr's Christian Realism

James Gustafson offers an overall assessment of
Niebuhr's theological ethic with which we can concur.

> The validation of ethics rests neither in abstract
> intellectual finesse, nor in scholarly authority that
> comes from reference to traditional sources, but in
> the illumination of human, historical experience. To
> this, Niebuhr brought a virtuosity unsurpassed in this
> century.[143]

Niebuhr's virtuosity can be found in both his more
theoretical theological work, such as The Nature and
Destiny of Man, and in his occasional pieces written in
response to contemporary social and political life.
Throughout our analysis, we have noted many of Niebuhr's
significant contributions to an adequate Christian
political ethic. His discussion of the way sin distorts
even our highest moral aspirations is particularly
illuminating. We need, as well, Niebuhr's consistent
cautions against moral complacency and pretension. The
attention Niebuhr gives to themes of conflict and power is
an important reminder to political ethicists of the need
to take these seriously in our reflections.

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[143]James M. Gustafson, Christian Ethics and the
Community (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971), 33.

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With regard to political democracy, Niebuhr's discussion offers a great deal as well. He points again to the need to incorporate majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in an adequate normative conception of democracy. He calls attention to the importance of developing a case for morally justifiable, limited coercion as part of a justification for state action. His analysis of the importance of tolerance for political democracy is among the best discussions of this topic.

While Niebuhr consistently offers deep and illuminating insights into human nature, political ethics and modern life, we must take issue with some of the positions he adopts. Our criticisms do not in any way detract from his enormous accomplishments, or our need to build on those accomplishments.

A great many themes in Niebuhr's ethic are built around dichotomies or discontinuities: love and justice, history and transcendence, agape and mutual love. Niebuhr's desire to comprehend the relationship between these seemingly dichotomous ideas is admirable, yet the way he specifies the nature of and relationships between many of these concepts is inadequate.

Does Niebuhr consider historical political life in penultimate terms? The idea of "penultimacy" was introduced in our discussion of Wogaman's ethic, but Franklin

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Gamwell, in an essay on Niebuhr's ethic, provides another
helpful delineation of the idea.

> Theological understanding should provide an un-
> qualified affirmation of human concern for this world
> and its affairs while insisting that the worth of this
> world depends upon some transcendent reality.[144]

Gamwell goes on to specify that the transcendent source of
meaning for historical existence can either be inclusive
of that historical existence or not inclusive of it.[145]
We define the idea of historical-political life as
penultimate when the transcendent source of meaning is
inclusive of historical existence. Does Niebuhr take this
position?

There is absolutely no doubt that Niebuhr wants to
affirm the value of human concern for this world. Niebuhr
argues that human persons can be workers together with God
in the creation of a more loving and just human life. The
Christian faith compels us to be involved in the difficult
task of creating a more tolerable justice.[146] At the same
time, Niebuhr's characterization of a trans-historical
norm and source of meaning leaves us wondering whether or
not it includes historical existence.[147] Gamwell argues

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[144]Franklin I. Gamwell, "Niebuhr's Theistic Ethic,"
in The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr, 63.

[145]Ibid., 64.

[146]Niebuhr, "The Weakness of the Modern Church"
(1948), in Essays, 71.

[147]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I: 163-166.

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that Niebuhr remains inconsistent on this point, and we can agree.[148] In other words, Niebuhr wants to affirm the value of human concern for historical-political life, yet Niebuhr is inconsistent in his affirmation of the penultimate reality of such existence. It is arguing for the penultimate reality of historical life that human concern for the world is appropriately valued.

The inconsistency in Niebuhr's position on the value of historical existence can also be found in the way he bifurcates love and justice. Even outside the issue of the penultimacy of history, the separation of love and justice is problematic. The problem begins with Niebuhr's understanding of the norm of love. For Niebuhr, the ultimate form of love, agape, is sacrificial love. However, is "sacrifice" really an adequate centerpiece for a Christian understanding of love?

Stephen Post, in <u>A Theory of Agape</u>, argues that placing self-sacrifice and self-denial at the center of an understanding of love "devalues the reciprocal character of common human relational experience." An overemphasis on self-denial often arises in a theology rooted in the image of the cross rather than in images of creation and nature. Communion between persons in mutual love is a more adequate centerpiece for a Christian understanding of love. Nevertheless, a Christian understanding of the role

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[148]Gamwell, "Niebuhr's Ethic," 77.

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of self-denial in relationships of love remains important

for strategic purposes, as a check against the degener-

ation of mutuality into cold calculations of self-

interest.[149]

Daniel Day Williams offers a similar alternative

view of love in direct response to Niebuhr. Williams

argues that agape/love intends the Kingdom of God, "the

bringing of all things to creative dynamic harmony under

the sovereign rule of God."[150] Williams argues that

Niebuhr himself holds this harmony to be the highest good.

Love intends a good, the Kingdom of God, which includes

the ultimate good of the self. It is an order of

mutuality. Mutuality or mutual love, as developed by

Williams, is distinct from Niebuhr's view of it.

> Agape intends a good which does include the ultimate
> good of the self. In intention universal mutual love
> and sacrificial love are one, for what is intended is
> the mutual good of all, and where this is intended the
> self is ready to sacrifice anything for that good
> except the good itself.[151]

Thus sacrifice still has an important place in a Christian

ethic of love. Sacrificial love becomes a willingness to

give oneself to the good of the Kingdom of God, which

includes one's own good, but remains much more than simply

one's own good.[152]

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[149]Post, 48-51.

[150]Daniel Day Williams, God's Grace and Man's Hope
(New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 75.

[151]Ibid., 76.   [152]Ibid., 76-80.

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If mutual love is the more central reality of a Christian understanding of love, then not every assertion of the self need be sinful. Niebuhr's warnings about the sin of pride would still be very relevant, pride redefined as excessive self-concern. However, such a position on love makes sensuality or sloth, just as relevant. Self-deprecation and the failure to assert oneself and one's power appropriately in the cause of justice is also sin. Niebuhr seemed to recognize this without giving it its due.[153]

If Niebuhr's position that there is an ultimate contradiction between human self-assertion and agape must be modified as we reconceptualize agape, then conflict, in which different persons assert their claims against one another, is not necessarily morally evil. Niebuhr recognizes that conflict can be nonmorally beneficial, for justice is constructed in the midst of conflicting claims. In this, Niebuhr agrees, to some extent, with sociologist Lewis Coser, who argues that social conflict can be beneficial or functional for a social group.[154] However, justice remains fundamentally distinct from love. Recognizing the potential benefits of conflict is only one

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[153]Delwin Brown, "Notes on the Nature and Destiny of Sin, or How a Niebuhrian Process Theology of Liberation is Possible," in Theology, Politics and Peace, ed. Theodore Runyon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 160-161.

[154]Coser.

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step in removing the moral stigma from it. The point we
are making goes even deeper. Not only might social
conflict have beneficial consequences, but the various
assertions of claims that lie at the root of many such
conflicts are not necessarily wrong in themselves.

Even if we argue against viewing all conflict as
consistently evil, that conflict needs to be dealt with,
and the various claims need to be adjudicated. However,
if one can distinguish between more or less legitimate
forms of self-assertion, one can also distinguish between
legitimate and illegitimate claims. If, from the
perspective of one's highest moral standard, one might
never appropriately assert a claim, then it is difficult
to see how one could speak of legitimate moral claims.
Every claim for oneself would have some degree of
illegitimacy. Niebuhr seems to take this position. "All
claims within the general field of interests must be
proportionately satisfied and related to each other
harmoniously."[155] Niebuhr makes no distinction here
between valid, legitimate claims and illegitimate claims,
yet such a distinction can be profoundly helpful for
social ethics.[156]

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[155]Niebuhr, <u>Nature and Destiny</u>, II: 69.

[156]Feinberg, <u>Social Philosophy</u>, 64-67.

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If persons and groups might assert claims in a morally legitimate manner, in keeping with a standard of mutual love, then the gap between justice and love can be bridged. Paul Ramsey, who is often associated with Christian Realism, argues that Niebuhr endangers the meaning of love in his emphasis on sacrifice. For Ramsey, the central reality of love is concern for the well-being of another.[157] While Ramsey would have some serious reservations about the principle of mutual love, that I am developing here, there is no doubt that concern for others is also a central aspect of mutuality.[158] Ramsey argues that, on occasion, love may require sacrificial action. However, it may also require acting preferentially for some and against others. Ramsey describes justice as "what Christian love does when confronted by two or more neighbors."[159] For Ramsey, there is no bifurcation between love and justice. Rather "love interpenetrates and invigorates justice at every point, and often refashions it."[160] Ramsey serves as a helpful ally as we

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[157]Paul Ramsey, "Love and Law," in Reinhold Niebuhr, ed. Kegley and Bretall, 108-109.

[158]Carol C. Gould, Rethinking Democracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77. Ramsey criticizes Williams in his Niebuhr article.

[159]Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Scribner's, 1950), 347.

[160]Ramsey, Nine Modern Moralists (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962; reprint, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 5.

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question Niebuhr's view of the relationship between love
and justice.

The position we are developing in our assessment of
Niebuhr's ethic is that the sometimes radical discon-
tinuities in that ethic, while often leading to profound
insights, are problematic. One of the reasons Niebuhr
wants to maintain a distance between love and justice is
his concern for moral complacency. If persons believe
that love can be achieved, then they will be tempted to
become apathetic. However, Niebuhr himself argues that
the most significant gap in moral achievement is not the
distance between love and justice.

> The contradiction between actual social institutions
> and arrangements and the ideal of brotherhood is
> obviously greater than between love and the rules and
> laws of justice.[161]

Furthermore, Niebuhr recognizes the importance of the
element of time in discussing moral achievements. "New
conditions may change an old justice into a new
injustice."[162] These two considerations are sufficient to
combat the temptation to moral complacency, even if we
affirm the possibility that love can be approximately
realized in the midst of a history that has penultimate

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[161]Niebuhr, <u>Nature and Destiny</u>, II: 247-248.

[162]Niebuhr, "God's Design and the Present Disorder
of Civilization" (1948), 109; "Development of a Social
Ethic," 181; both in <u>Fatih and Politics</u>.

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significance. We can benefit from the work of those we have just discussed, and those discussed in previous chapters, who might give a different slant on Niebuhrian themes without necessarily losing his immense insights. We ought to add that Niebuhr was not simply concerned to battle moral complacency, but also to unmask the pretension of many who claim to have achieved moral success. This insight need not be given up either.

We will carry this assessment of Niebuhr's basic theological-ethical position into our assessment of his thinking about political democracy. Here again Niebuhr is insightful, so far as general themes in democratic theory are concerned. Perhaps because of his own life experience with them, Niebuhr is particularly interesting on political parties, when compared to other theological ethicists. Niebuhr's conception of political democracy seeks to preserve the moral concerns represented in both majoritarian and minoritarian models of democracy. However, his conception of democracy suffers from the lack of a deep integration of various principles and concerns. Niebuhr's conception of democracy seems to set the values of majoritarianism and minoritarianism side-by-side and does not offer enough help in judging the needed functions of each. More often than not, the various concerns of majoritarians and minoritarians are traded-off more than integrated. This may be the best theological ethics can

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do, but given some of the inadequacies in Niebuhr's position, particularly those concerning his failure to make an important distinction between legitimate and illegitimate claims, we ought not to be convinced that such a balance is all we can achieve.

The idea that various moral concerns can be traded off against one another fits within an ethic which asserts that, at some level, all claims made in the name of moral principles are tainted with self-interest. Niebuhr occasionally viewed his position as a form of Christian pragmatism.[163] In this article, Niebuhr discusses the need for bringing various moral concerns together, under an approach that is pragmatic, i.e. that emphasizes various concerns as the circumstances warrant. This pragmatic recognition of historical contingency is an important insight, but might serve its purposes better in the context of a "common good" ethic, where moral principles are not simply brought together, but are more deeply related, so far as this is possible. This has the potential to give more adequate moral direction by granting differing weights and/or functions to various moral principles as compared to others. Furthermore, when one attempts to relate varying moral principles and rules within an overarching principle, one tends to seek the

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[163]Niebuhr, "Development of a Social Ethic."

deeper common denominators, if any, between seemingly

disparate principles.

Previously we argued that Niebuhr identifies many of

the crucial ingredients that would be part of a Christian

conception of the common good. We also noted that Niebuhr

never worked at developing such a conception. Certainly

part of the reason Niebuhr never worked out a conception

of the common good has to do with some of the history and

connotation of the concept. Insofar as the common good

connotes the possibility of achieving some genuinely good

results in history, morally good results, Niebuhr would

shy away from its use for obvious reasons.

The history of the concept of the common good in

Roman Catholic thought, as Niebuhr knew and understood it,

also led him to question its usefulness. The concept of

the common good has its roots in natural law theory.[164]

Niebuhr criticized Catholic natural law ethics, arguing

that it tended to raise historically contingent standards

to the heights of ultimate norms given in natural law.[165]

He also argued that natural law ethics claimed to know

exactly what justice is, and that this claim was

specious.[166] Furthermore, traditional Catholic

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[164]Curran, "The Common Good and Official Catholic
Social Teaching."

[165]Niebuhr, "Development of a Social Ethic," 168.

[166]Niebuhr, "The Pope's Christmas Message" (1942),
in Essays, 214.

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understandings of the common good tended to submerge the issue of conflict.[167] This would hardly make the common good an attractive principle to Niebuhr.

Niebuhr's concerns about claiming too much for either moral knowledge or moral achievement, as well as his appropriate appreciation for the persistence of conflict in social life, stood in the way of his developing a conception of the common good. Having criticized the method by which Niebuhr seeks to avoid moral complacency, i.e., by disallowing genuine approximate realizations of love within history (as distinct from "approximations" of love) we are free to use much of Niebuhr's ethic in a construction of a Christian conception of the common good. As we have seen in previous chapters, a Christian conception of the common good allows for the possibility that some aspects of the common good are determined by processes of dialogue within the contingencies of history. Thereby we can accept Niebuhr's insight that the definitions of moral norms have historically contingent elements to them.[168] We can also acknowledge the importance of Niebuhr's emphasis on tolerance as an essential aspect of the ethos of a democratic society. Tolerance allows for the full development

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[167]Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict, 161-166.

[168]Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II: 253.

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of democratic dialogue in which criticism of the government becomes "an instrument of better government."[169] Tolerance also opens up the possibility for persons to hear the word of God that can be found even in secular idealism.[170]

Such a conception of the common good might then serve as the ground for the construction of an adequate normative conception of political democracy which moves beyond a simple trade off between majoritarian and minoritarian concerns. This normative view of democracy might provide more adequate guidance for Christian persons seeking to live responsible moral lives within the socio-political dimension of human existence. Providing such guidance, and spurring Christians to action were primary concerns of Niebuhr's ethic. We appreciate his grand achievements, while finding ways to build upon them and avoid their inadequacies. Surely any adequate normative conception of political democracy will need to incorporate significant elements of Niebuhr's thought.

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[169]Ibid., II: 268.

[170]Niebuhr, "The Church and Equal Rights for Women" (1949), in Essays, 94.

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CHAPTER VIII

POLITICAL DEMOCRACY AND
VISIONS OF THE COMMON GOOD

Where do we go from here? We have examined a variety of normative perspectives on political democracy rooted in Christian theological ethics. Some generalizations about what we have discovered are in order.

Each of the six theological ethicists whose work we analyzed, Yoder, Novak, Wogaman, Maritain, Sturm, and Niebuhr, constructs a Christian political ethic that is broadly reformationist. Each recognizes that historical achievements fall short of the Kingdom of God, which represents a broad normative ideal. Sin is a pervasive reality in human existence. Human ideals and principles can be sinfully distorted and misused. Structures of justice can, over time, become structures of injustice. Each ethicist, in his own way, encourages a continuing reformation of human social life. Each encourages a struggle against sin and the structures of sin.

Yoder's ethic takes a distinctive turn after this. He argues that a Christian ethic developed in light of the eschatological Kingdom of God, while directly applicable to historical life, can only be embodied in the social

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life of the Christian Church. It is simply a fact that earthly governing powers rule through domination of one sort or another. Authentic reformation of human social life occurs in the Church, though Christians can and should witness to the State. Christians can use the rhetorical resources of political democracy to blunt the edges of secular governance and to mitigate the destructiveness of domination.

All of our ethicists remind us that Christian ethical reflection is part of a broader reflection on human life, on Christian faith, and on the nature and activity of God. An adequate Christian social ethic must incorporate reflection on these issues in ways appropriate to Christian faith traditions and credible to human reason and experience. A coherent ethic demonstrates a continuity of concerns. While Yoder presents a coherent position, we argued against the adequacy of that position and thus for a position which sees potential for a broad application of Christian ethical principles to human social and political life. In this we are joined by the other ethicists we considered. Furthermore, we argued for a theological-ethical stance which can view historical achievements as genuine goods, which while not ultimate in themselves, have a significance for what is ultimate.

Our six ethicists were chosen because they represent differing perspectives within Christian ethics and because

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they offered some measure of sustained and systematic
reflection on political democracy. Each ethicist offered,
in one way or another, a Christian case for political
democracy. When explored with some depth, each offered
some normative conception of democracy which incorporates
both majoritarian and minority-protection concerns.[1]

In general, our ethicists sought to include some of
the important normative principles and concerns repre-
sented by these two conceptions of democracy, though with
varying degrees of success. Some of the ethicists
considered did not identify an adequately broad range of
democratic concerns. Novak comes to mind as the prime
example of this. Wogaman, Maritain, Sturm, and Niebuhr
all presented a broad range of democratic concerns, with
Niebuhr, in particular excelling in this. While each of
these latter four ethicists also tried to relate the
normative principles and concerns underlying majoritarian
and minority-protection models of democracy, none of these
efforts were fully adequate. In our first chapter we
criticized political theorists who simply placed
majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in a single

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[1]From this point on, our generalizations are less
applicable to Yoder's position. As we argued previously,
Yoder's normative conception of democracy is not a "pol-
itical democracy" in the sense that interests us here. We
reject Yoder's diminution of the significance of the
political, though some of his thoughts on democracy are
incorporated elsewhere in this chapter.

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conceptual box and said, "this is democracy." We seek a
more coherent balance where the relationship between the
normative principles and moral concerns of majoritarian
and minoritarian democracy is developed in such a way that
the compatibilities and tensions can be more adequately
revealed. On the basis of the analytic work done to this
point it can be argued that the most adequate way to
relate these normative principles and concerns would be
to: 1) develop a basic theological-ethical stance that
includes a metaphysical or ontological perspective which
grounds and shapes the meaning of the normative principles
and concerns we hope to relate; 2) identify the important
political-ethical principles and moral concerns that
democracy should serve; and 3) focus the relationship of
the relevant normative principles around an overarching
normative principle.

In spite of these shortcomings, the work done on

While analyzing our ethicists helped us to identify
the contours of an adequate relationship between major-
itarian and minoritarian democratic concerns, none of the
ethicists adequately addressed this issue head-on. None
of the ethicists we considered gave sufficient attention
to an analysis of "democracy." We needed to dig deeply
into the political ethical thought of each to locate
threads of ideas which might be woven together to address
the majoritarian-minoritarian issue.

In spite of these shortcomings, the work done on

Yoder, Novak, Wogaman, Maritain, Sturm, and Niebuhr has

given us direction for our task of finding an appropriate

way to include majoritarian and minority-protection

concerns in an adequate normative conception of democracy

grounded in Christian theological ethics. The construc-

tive work to be done in this chapter builds on ideas and

directions discovered in the analytic work of the previous

chapters, though we engage a host of other theorists in

our construction.

How might we proceed, then, in deciding the

appropriate place for majoritarian and minoritarian

concerns within an adequate normative conception of pol-

itical democracy constructed from Christian theological-

ethical sources? Let us state again that the most

adequate Christian political-ethical conceptions of

democracy are those which try to bring majoritarian and

minoritarian concerns together. Trying to relate these

different concerns in a single normative conception of

democracy entails bringing together the values and

normative principles which undergird majoritarianism and

minoritarianism. In the course of our discussion we

suggested that a "recipe" balance might be the most

adequate way to relate various values and principles.

Such a balance seeks a high degree of coherence and mutual

interpretation among various values and principles.

Achieving such a recipe often involves reinterpreting

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concepts. It is assumed that concepts have a certain elasticity to them, though continuity must be shown between conventional understandings and reinterpretations if those reinterpretations are to be convincing.

If there are good reasons for seeking a recipe balance of values and principles, a focal point is needed. In the course of our analysis in the previous chapters, we argued that the "common good" can function as an overarching normative concept and principle for our efforts to think about important Christian political-ethical principles and their relationship. In this concluding chapter, we will argue that developing a conception of the common good provides a fruitful way of trying to develop a normative conception of political democracy and to determine the appropriate place in it for majoritarian and minoritarian principles and concerns. In our effort to link democracy and the common good we are following the lead of some of the ethicists we have considered. We will not be arguing that beginning with some conception of the common good is the only way for Christian political ethics to think normatively about democracy, only that such a move is a potentially productive way forward. We hope to demonstrate this by providing outlines, rather than fully developed conceptions, of the common good and of democracy conceived in relation to the common good. Our efforts will build

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upon the work done in analyzing our theological-ethicists but will go beyond them in the degree of integration sought and in incorporating the work of various political theorists.

Considering the Common Good

Our analysis of contemporary theological-ethical thinking about political democracy points to the concept of the common good as a point where we might be able to integrate the various moral principles which issue forth in different models of democracy. The common good can be considered an overarching normative principle which integrates other principles. "The common good functions above all as a coordinating principle, and the weight of relevant norms will alter depending on circumstances."[2] The common good as a social ideal is an attempt to define the good human life of the community in terms of moral principles, values and virtues. Thinking about the common good involves thinking about the coherence and potential integration of diverse moral principles, different values and various virtues, along with a consideration of meta-physics or ontology and social theory.

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[2]Drew Christiansen, "The Common Good and the Politics of Self-interest: A Catholic Contribution to the Practice of Citizenship" in Beyond Individualism, ed. Donald L. Gelpi (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 81. See also Sturm, Community and Alienation, 166-167 and Hollenbach, Claims in Conflict, 148.

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We are searching for a recipe for the common good.
Let us remind ourselves of the meaning of this idea.
Terry Pinkard contrasts two ways to balance principles,
compromise and recipe. With a recipe view of balance, the
goal is to balance ingredients to achieve a desired
result, and the ingredients have their value in terms of
the overall balance. Pinkard goes on to say that the
recipe balance, which is the most appropriate method for
balancing moral principles, requires that we have some end
in view.[3] The end we are concerned with is the common
good which can be described abstractly as a society in
which everyone shares in the goodness of the quality of
life and thus has significant opportunities for human
development and human flourishing.[4] Ideas of human
development and human flourishing are understood within an
ontology or metaphysics, as well as within a theological
tradition. The common good, then, abstractly considered
denotes the idea of human flourishing in community. The
recipe for the common good gives more content to this
idea, as well as direction for its achievement. Pinkard
argues that while there is no single clear-cut recipe for
the well-ordered society, it is the task of philosophical

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[3]Pinkard, Democratic Liberalism and Social Union,
132-133.

[4]Christiansen, 64, 81.

theory to construct such recipes.[5] We have taken it as
our task as well.

Reflecting on the common good is valuable not only
in terms of our project, but for other important reasons.
The idea of the common good tends to fit well with the
kind of social ontology we find convincing in Sturm. It
has a long history within Christian thought and great
potential for being understood in Christian covenantal
terms. The common good connotes the possibility of shared
life, of enhancing our essential relatedness.[6] Some have
argued that the idea of the common good is important for
progressive political movements seeking social justice.
The common good provides an elusive but necessary vision
of a just social order.[7] Others have argued that our
current social and political situation requires a return
to thinking about the common good. William Sullivan, for
example, argues that in recent decades within the
political life of the United States, a larger sense of
collective responsibility for social life has developed.
In the face of this reality, we need an enriched language
for our public life "to amplify our social capacities to

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[5]Pinkard, 133.

[6]John Langan, "Common Good" in The Westminster
Dictionary of Christian Ethics, 102.

[7]Gary Dorrien, Reconstructing the Common Good
(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 4.

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interpret and debate the common purposes on which our increasingly interdependent world depends."[8] Finally one might argue that an intentional focus on the common good as a topic for public discourse might create an ethos more conducive to the flourishing of persons-in-community which is the very aim of the common good.[9]

Thinking about the common good, then, has several potential benefits beyond providing a way forward as we seek to consider the shape of an adequate normative conception of political democracy. Such benefits can be had only when we begin to sketch out a conception of the common good. Our sketch begins with a distinction between various levels of thinking about the common good. The common good has a place in eschatological discourse, in discourse about social ideals for historical-political life, and in discourse within a more concrete context. We will discuss the common good within each of these levels of discourse.

The common good considered eschatologically is the Kingdom of God. At this level of discourse, the common good has an aesthetic and visionary quality to it. This is evident as we consider some important instances of

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[8]William Sullivan, "Bringing the Good Back In," in _Liberalism and the Good_, ed. R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara and Henry S. Richardson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 154-155.

[9]Sturm, 85.

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Christian thinking about the Kingdom of God, each of which
contributes something to our sketch of the eschatological
common good.

Philip Wogaman argues for a politics of change in-
spired by the Kingdom of God, which he understands to be a
society of love, mutual support and justice.[10] These
themes find their way into most understandings of the
Kingdom of God.

Daniel Day Williams understands the Kingdom of God
to be an order of mutuality intended by the love of God.
All selves and all real values have their place within it.
It is a universal community in which the development of
each person is enhanced by what she or he gives to or
receives from every other person. This mutual enhancement
of life, this mutual good of all, represents a creative
dynamic harmony under the rule of God.[11] In short, "love
is the content of the Kingdom."[12] Williams makes a
convincing case that this understanding of the Kingdom of
God is shared by Reinhold Niebuhr.

From a slightly different angle, but consistent with
Wogaman and Williams, Nicholas Wolterstorff offers a view

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[10]Wogaman, <u>Christian Perspectives</u>, 96, 240. <u>Method</u>,
220, 240.

[11]Daniel Day Williams, <u>God's Grace and Man's Hope</u>,
79, 75-76.

[12]Ibid., 65.

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of the Kingdom of God as a responsible community wherein justice is enjoyed by each person and peace characterizes relationships with God, self, others and nature.[13] This vision of _shalom_, where justice and peace embrace joyfully, "is both God's cause in the world and our human calling."[14]

Each of these conceptions of the Kingdom of God has a strong social dimension or covenantal quality to it. At this aesthetic-visionary level of moral discourse one's metaphysical commitments are suggested. Sturm's social ontology provides philosophical and conceptual support to these relational and covenantal images.

David Hollenbach argues that the Kingdom of God has political relevance, as Wolterstorff also suggests.[15] It seems particularly relevant as it shapes and is mediated by a conception of the common good as a social ideal for historical life. The Kingdom of God provides a guiding image for the common good as a social ideal - an image that we require. "Political visions are essential to the

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[13]Nicholas Wolterstorff, _Until Justice and Peace Embrace_ (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 69-72.

[14]Ibid., 72.

[15]David Hollenbach, "The Common Good Revisited," _Theological Studies_ 50 (1989), 84-85.

health of a society. They prevent politics becoming mere business motivated by a cynical self-interest."[16]

The Kingdom of God is an eschatological ideal whose full realization remains future. Yet its vision inspires us to ask what direction we ought to take in our own life in human communities. Conceptions of the common good as an ideal for historical-political life provide a response. As an ideal, the common good at this level of discourse remains abstract and general. It retains a certain aesthetic and visionary quality, but it ought to be more developed conceptually than the idea of the Kingdom of God. One way to develop the common good more conceptually is by being more explicit about its broad metaphysical and ontological commitments. As many have argued, every political theory contains within it a predominant conception of the human person.[17] In thinking about the common good as a social ideal one ought to develop such ideas explicitly.

Besides being more conceptually developed than the idea of the Kingdom of God, the common good as a social ideal should be more useful for giving direction for human action. Even at this level, the common good remains

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[16]Charles Davis, Religion and the Making of Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 174.

[17]C.B. Macpherson, The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 4-5. Hallowell, 89. Gould, 91.

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beyond full realization, but it is not beyond partial, or
approximate realizations.[18] These achievements represent
the genuine achievement of moral good, the genuine ability
to do right. Such realizations will always be fragmentary
because of the pervasiveness of sin in the dynamic
character of historical life. The common good as a social
ideal is shaped, in part, in the face of the reality of
sin. Yet sin often masks itself in the very ideals which
seek to work against it. Enormous harm has been
perpetrated under the banners of justice, the good, the
right, et. al.

We begin our sketch of the common good as a social
ideal by discussing some of its formal aspects. We have
already discussed the common good as an overarching
principle, a cluster concept, a compound norm. Let us
move on, then, to some formal definitions of the common
good.

We encountered one formal definition of the common
good when we inquired about the end in view for our recipe
of the common good. Drew Christiansen asserts that the
common good aims at human flourishing and is concerned
with those conditions of social living which work toward
that end.[19] This definition is supported by Maritain who

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[18]Novak, Free Persons and the Common Good, 113.
Maritain, The Person and the Common Good, 78.

[19]Christiansen, 63-64.

argues that the common good includes, as an essential
element, the development of human persons. For Maritain,
the common good is the human good of the multitude, the
good of the social whole which must flow back to each
person.[20]

A similar formal conception of the common good with
this dynamic interaction between persons and community is
developed by Douglas Sturm. For Sturm, the public good is
the good of the public. It is "that texture of relation-
ships in which the life of all is enhanced by the actions
and dispositions of each one."[21]

> It is the good of the relationships through which the
> members of the community sustain one another,
> contribute to one another, and constitute a creative
> center for the ongoing life of the community.[22]

Sturm makes the point more clearly than Maritain or
Christiansen that human flourishing is the flourishing of
relational persons. Our development as persons entails
contributing to and receiving from the communities of
which we are a part.[23] The common good is a texture of
relationships in which that person-community dynamic works
to the good of all those involved. The common good as a
texture of relationships can be further characterized in

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[20]Maritain, Person and Common Good, 51-55.

[21]Sturm, Community, 162.

[22]Ibid., 85.

[23]See also Gould, Rethinking Democracy.

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terms of other moral principles and values. These principles constitute a recipe for the common good. Each contributing principle, therefore, needs to be understood in the context of the common good and of the social ontology which supports the formal idea of the common good discussed.

What are some of the principles which might comprise the common good as a composite normative principle? Bruce Douglass describes traditional formulations of the common good as including certain objectives designed to promote human well-being. Among those objectives were peace, order, prosperity, justice and community.[24] These objectives were considered goods in two senses. First of all, these objectives represented achievements beneficial to persons. Secondly, these benefits were considered good in a moral sense in that they contribute to human development, intellectually, spiritually and morally.[25] As moral goods, these objectives could also be viewed as moral principles or moral action-guides. They describe states of affairs that ought to be pursued.

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[24]Bruce Douglass, "The Common Good and the Public Interest," Political Theory 8 (February, 1980), 104. Note the parallels to elements included in the Niebuhrian conception of the common good constructed in our Chapter VII.

[25]Douglass, 104-105. This is a different sense of "morally good" from that offered by some other moral philosophers, e.g., Frankena, Ethics, 62.

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To this list of goods/principles we might add a couple of others. "The aim of Christian social ethics is to discover and promote the establishment of those conditions which will aid the growth of communities of freedom, justice and equality."[26] We can say, then, that the common good as a social ideal represents greater realizations of an order (coordination of society so that it might act as a whole on its own behalf) which: 1) is directed toward the achievement of justice and equality, 2) enhances freedom, and 3) strengthens the relational bond within the community. The principle of subsidiarity has a distinct role in this conception of the common good. The common good, while a norm for political life is never solely the responsibility of the state. Persons as they engage each other in a wide variety of associations and communities construct aspects of the common good. The principle of subsidiarity seeks to preserve the goods of those smaller associations while recognizing that they occur in a larger context which can also be productive of good.[27] The principle supports the idea that social issues ought to be resolved at the level where sufficient insight and power can be brought together for their successful resolution. The social ideal of the common

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[26]Williams, 167.

[27]Hollenbach, Claims, 159-160.

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good, then, is a cluster of goods/principles which aim at the development of persons-in-community. The principles delineate the meaning of the goods sought and direct persons and groups toward their achievement. We continue our sketch of the common good as a social ideal by considering some of its important constituent principles.

Justice is the central component of any adequate conception of the common good. There is widespread agreement on the importance of justice for an adequate Christian socio-political ethic, as is evident from our work in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, justice does not define the whole of the common good. Virginia Held writes, "we can respect persons' rights and fulfill our obligations to them and still have a world without joy, beauty, playfulness or love."[28] Justice is not the only characteristic texture in relationships that promotes human flourishing, though it remains the central principle in the social ideal of the common good.

Justice itself is a complex concept and norm. Sturm discusses justice in terms of freedom, equality, community and wisdom without stretching the elasticity of the idea to a breaking point. Michael Walzer argues for an understanding of justice as "complex equality."[29]

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[28]Virginia Held, <u>Rights and Goods</u> (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 18.

[29]Walzer, <u>Spheres of Justice</u>.

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Nevertheless, the concept is not so complex that we cannot give it some content.

At the center of justice one finds two basic ideas: 1) giving each one her or his due, and 2) treating like cases alike and unlike cases differently.[30] These are formal definitions of justice. The material content of justice is developed in response to the questions of what is due and what constitute significant likenesses and differences.

One fundamental thing that is due each person is equal recognition as a person. For Christians this is recognition of all others as persons equally created in the image of God - free, thinking, creative and relational persons with capacities to develop these qualities. In the work on our ethicists we discovered that Christian ethics incorporates a significant sense of human equality. In developing his theory of justice, Michael Walzer assumes mutual recognition between persons as fellow human beings with bodies, minds, feelings, hopes, and possibly souls.[31] Such mutual recognition seems a necessary beginning for a theory of justice as the central principle within the common good.

Beyond that, however, what is due and what are the significant likenesses? A variety of answers have been

[30]Feinberg, Social Philosophy, 98-99.

[31]Walzer, Spheres, xii.

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given to these questions including criteria of simple equality (give everyone the same), need, desert (effort expended or results achieved), virtue, promises made, potential, free exchange.[32] Given the idea of basic human equality discussed above, some provision for basic needs seems a necessary part of a Christian conception of justice. However, basic needs, and the other concepts listed have a certain openness about them. Walzer argues that different sets of goods, and the meanings attached to them, constitute different distributive spheres in which different standards of justice apply.[33] This part of his proposal has initial plausibility, whatever the short-comings of other aspects of his theory of justice. In other words, no single criterion of justice seems adequate across all distributions of the benefits and burdens of society.

Even if we agree that an adequate theory of justice must allow for different criteria in different circum-stances, we still have criteria that are themselves open to interpretation. We will argue that some of the content can be provided by our understanding of other principles within the common good and by the general ideas about human nature and the human good within which the concept of the common good is developed. As William Galston

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[32]Feinberg, 109.

[33]Walzer, <u>Spheres of Justice</u>.

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argues, every theory of justice rests on some view of the good.[34] While this gives us a direction to look in constructing a theory of justice, we must acknowledge that a variety of positions on the human good are held by varieties of persons. Each theory of justice, with its attendant view of the good gives moral legitimacy to a variety of claims, many of which can be and are couched in the language of rights.

Determinate justice within history requires evaluation and adjudication of various claims to what is due. It involves prioritizing various claims. The variety of claims is fertile ground for conflict in social life and an adequate degree of conflict resolution is required to preserve the order necessary for the common good. Niebuhr proves very insightful here. All of these considerations help us understand justice as a central element in the common good.

Another good and principle within the common good is that of community, and participation in community. In developing his theory of justice, Walzer argues that community itself is a good. The very idea of distributive justice presupposes a bounded world within which distributions take place.[35] Walzer also argues that

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[34]William Galston, *Justice and the Human Good*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 55.

[35]Walzer, *Spheres*, 29-31.

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effective self-determination requires the existence of a state.[36] Furthermore, the goods of self-esteem and self-respect are relational. For these and other reasons, humans have need for community.[37] While Walzer's primary focus is on political community, he does not ignore our need for other types of communities.[38]

Community is a complex concept. It can be viewed as an intermediate form of associational life, between primary groups and formal associations. When so under-stood, community is a style of group life characterized by commitment to common goals, a measure of shared values, opportunities for personal interaction, and agreed-upon expectations for membership.[39] Community in a broader and more normative sense sees any form of human association as having potential for community, that is, for embodying shared concerns and processes by which those concerns are discussed. Community in this sense is possible at the

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[36]Ibid., 44.

[37]Ibid., 273-278, 65.

[38]Ibid., 300.

[39]Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, Community of Faith (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 24-28, 49-58. For some other relevant perspectives on community see: Ronald Beiner, What's the Matter With Liberalism (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 33-35; and Larry L. Rasmussen, Moral Fragments and Moral Community (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993).

level of the nation-state.[40] The good of community refers
primarily to this broader notion. As a normative prin-
ciple it directs us to shape our associations in the
direction of community. Our need for community even at
the national level does not allow us to ignore potential
obligations to others in other national communities.[41]

Our participation in and sharing of life with others
in a variety of communities is an important aspect of the
common good. Carol Gould offers a complimentary case for
this position in arguing that human self-development
requires engagement with others in common activity.[42]
Important aspects of the entire theme of participation in
community, with reference to politics, are brought out in
the following reflection by political theorist J. Roland
Pennock.

> Even within groups that have no political objectives,
> that make no attempt to influence public policy and do
> not in fact influence it, the activities which take
> place are in the broad sense political. They
> contribute to the development of talents, to the
> broadening of interests, to a recognition of and
> concern for the interests of others, and to group

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[40]Samuel H. Beer, To Make a Nation (Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press, 1993), 372-377. A.D. Lindsay,
Modern Democratic State, 242-249.

[41]Walzer, Spheres, 45-47. See also Henry Shue,
Basic Rights (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1980).

[42]Gould, Rethinking Democracy, 50. See also
Franklin Gamwell, Beyond Preference.

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loyalty and to the "sense of belonging" that is so important to most people.[43]

Justice and participation or sharing in community life are both vital aspects of an adequate understanding of the common good as an overarching normative principle which gathers together other principles and values. Our interpretations of justice and community interpenetrate. Justice requires a community while communities are constitutive of other goods and productive of goods to be shared. Justice and community are part of traditional conceptions of the common good, but modernity has come to value freedom as another important element in any common good.[44]

The importance of freedom can be understood in relation to justice and community. The nation-state can be considered a community within which distributive justice is embodied. Some measure of political participation is available to persons. Yet the goods of community and participation are not limited to participation in nation-state politics. The positive qualities of participation in "non-political" communities are enhanced, however, when persons are allowed to choose their associations. This argument is made by Franklin

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[43]J. Ronald Pennock, _Democratic Political Theory_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 450-451.

[44]Sturm, 164-165.

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Gamwell in <u>Beyond Preference</u>. Gamwell understands freedom

as opportunity for the development of individuality in

association. Freedom is enhanced both by the qualitative

character of the interaction within an association as well

as by the ability to choose association. Even though the

state itself is an involuntary association, the quality of

interaction within the state may enhance freedom if its

purposes are executed through discussion and debate in

which individuality is cultivated.[45] Yet the freedom to

choose among independent associations is also an important

means for enhancing freedom.

Freedom is required, then, by the good of partici-

pation in community. The reverse also appears true.

Carol Gould argues that freedom is both a capacity and the

exercise of that capacity. Exercising freedom decisively

shapes one's identity and character.[46] Humans are social

individuals and participation in common activity is

constitutive of self-development.[47] Participation is

required by freedom understood as freedom for development

and not simply as freedom from interference.

The dominant operative notion in both Gamwell's and

Gould's views of freedom is of freedom as for something

and not simply as freedom from domination, constraint, or

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[45]Gamwell, 143-145.

[46]Gould, 60.

[47]Ibid., 105-106.

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interference, as important as those are. David Hollenbach argues that the same liberal rights which express notions of freedom from constraint also have a dimension of empowerment, of freedom for activity.[48] In an earlier work, he argued that the idea of freedom for participation in social life has a moral priority over the freedom of powerful individuals or groups to act autonomously in their own interests.[49] The point of this analysis is to claim that freedom has an essential role in the common good, but that it must be understood in the context of the common good. Freedom from unjust constraint and freedom for participation in community life are both important human goods. Yet when the ability of some to enhance their lives by participation in community is threatened by the action of others, a prima facie case exists for justly limiting the freedom of action of the latter. Questions of determining when such a scenario is indeed the case, and of the appropriate means and strategy for justly limiting some of the freedom of some persons are important aspects of this issue. The view of freedom developed here, in the context of the common good, cannot be used to argue for an omnicompetent state.

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[48]Hollenbach, "Common Good," 90. Also Sturm, 87.

[49]Hollenbach, Claims, 177.

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Thus far we have proposed a view of the common good which understands it as a social order characterized by justice (including recognition of all persons as equally persons), participation in community, and freedom, as these are interpreted together. Each good/principle suggests goods and institutions which are substantive achievements of the common good. As we have seen, however, the meaning of each of these principles is open to debate. A conception of the common good in which a single understanding of these principles is imposed by wise guardians seems contradictory to the constitutive principles themselves. What is needed is a set of procedural practices which provide a framework for engaging in debate about the meaning and implications of the constitutive principles of the common good. This point is made by Bill Jordan.

> The common good involves recognizing that... people's life together as part of the same society demands a shared debate, negotiation and decision-making over issues of justice, freedom and equality.[50]

We have encountered the idea of a significant procedural dimension to the common good before. For Douglas Sturm the common good is both procedural and substantive, but the procedures through which a community debates and decides are not merely instrumental. These procedures "are ways of living together through time" and

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[50]Bill Jordan, <u>The Common Good</u> (London: Blackwell, 1989), 85.

"constitute the quality of the community." Sturm argues

that such procedures ought to be characterized by

openness, access and participation.[51]

Michael Perry offers a description of an ideal of

politics he calls "ecumenical politics." "In ecumenical

politics beliefs about human good play a basic role in

public deliberations about, and public justifications of,

contested political choices."[52] Perry's description of

ecumenical politics goes a long way toward describing an

ideal for the procedural dimension to the common good that

is consistent with the substantive principles of the

common good.

Essential to Perry's view of ecumenical politics are

two assertions about human persons and the character of

modern life. Perry argues that human judgement is

fallible and that this can be argued from within religious

premises.[53] To embrace this view of human persons is to

embrace fallibilism, and to be a fallibilist is to embrace

the ideal of self-critical rationality wherein one is

willing to have one's ideas challenged by both internal

and external dialogue.[54]

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[51]Sturm, 171.

[52]Michael Perry, _Love and Power_ (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1991), 43.

[53]Ibid., 132, 100-101. Niebuhr would agree though
he rightly adds that sin distorts perceptions of truth.

[54]Ibid., 60-62, 100-104.

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Persons are not only fallible, but the world in which we live is pluralistic. In the modern world we encounter a plurality of religious and moral communities. Perry argues that this pluralism can be "a more fertile source of deepening moral insight than can a monistic context."[55] A positive view of group pluralism also lies behind the principle of subsidiarity.[56]

Acceptance of both the reality of human fallibility and the existence of pluralism is conducive to tolerance.[57] Ecumenical politics is constituted by tolerance (ecumenical political tolerance) and by dialogue (the ideal of ecumenical political dialogue). Such dialogue aspires to discern or achieve, within a pluralistic context, common ground. Such efforts to establish common ground should be conducive to developing positions on political issues that fall within a range of reasonable options.[58] Ecumenical political dialogue is characterized by the presence of tolerance and by arguments stated in ways that strive for public intelligibility and public accessibility.[59] This dialogue involves both deliberation about positions and justification of positions taken.[60]

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[55]Ibid., 133, 85.

[56]Hollenbach, Claims, 157-160.

[57]Perry, 133.

[58]Ibid., 47.

[59]Ibid., 105.   [60]Ibid., 45-47.

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Ecumenical politics, constituted by tolerance and dialogue, is conducive to a number of goods. Perry argues that ecumenical political dialogue enhances political community, improves one's self-knowledge as such knowledge is dialogical, and is an expression of love.[61] We need such a politics in part because

> a practice of political justification from which
> disputed beliefs about human good are excluded lacks
> the normative resources required for addressing our
> most fundamental political-moral questions.[62]

Given our incorporation of Perry's ideal of ecumenical politics into a conception of the common good as a social ideal, his argument that such a politics is needed is also an argument for bringing the common good into political reflection.

Ecumenical politics, as a specification of the procedural dimension of the common good, is a process for deciding the meaning and more concrete implications of the common good. Justice, freedom, and participation in community all seek concrete embodiment. Furthermore, as Perry argues, substantive conditions are required to foster participation in ecumenical political dialogue, e.g. material well-being, personal security, education, civil and political freedoms.[63]

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[61]Ibid., 45-47, 50, 124.

[62]Ibid., 42.

[63]Ibid., 91.

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As we begin to conclude our sketch of the common good as a social ideal we need to say a word about rights. Many aspects of the common good described herein can be put into the language of rights, as Maritain often does.[64] Rights, as aspects of the common good must understood in relation to one another, and this will involve a reinterpretation of some classical understandings of the nature of rights.[65] Such a position relativizes rights in two senses. It relates rights to each other and it takes away the connotation of absoluteness from many rights, a connotation that often accompanies the very concept of rights. Such a relativization ought not be understood to take away the possibility that some set of basic rights with near absolute status could be developed.[66]

The common good as a social ideal, rooted in the guiding vision of the Kingdom of God, is intended to guide concrete historical decision-making and action within specific socio-historical contexts. To think about the common good in this way is to think about the historical-contextual common good.

Norms seek concrete embodiment in the structures and policies and activities of human historical life.[67] The

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[64]Maritain, Common Good, 51. Also Christiansen, 63.

[65]Sullivan, 162.

[66]Gould, 66. Shue.

[67]Gould, 210. Jordan, 85.

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social ideal of the common good can be approximately
realized, fragmentarily embodied in social policies, in
the creation and distribution of goods, in institutions
and their procedures. These approximate realizations
constitute "the common good" within history.

Most of the content of the historical-contextual
common good is determined through procedures characterized
by the procedural dimension of the common good as a social
ideal. The institutions which embody those procedures,
and some of the substantive policies and results issued
therefrom ("some" because the procedures themselves are no
guarantee of results consistent with the principles which
ground the procedures, though they ought to be) comprise
the historical-contextual common good. As this is open-
ended, we will consider some of the socio-historical
realities that have an impact on the common good at this
level.

At this level the common good is open to "discursive
examination, argument and testing."[68] Sullivan argues
that explicit focus on the common good within a political
community can itself be an element of the common good
within history. However, every position asserted within
history need not immediately invoke the common good.

> What will count as a matter of common concern will be
> decided precisely through discursive contestation. It

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[68]Sullivan, 149.

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follows that no topics should be ruled off limits in advance of such contestation. On the contrary, democratic publicity requires positive guarantees of opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should now become so.[69]

In other words, while focus on the common good within a political community is itself part of the historical-contextual common good, this ought not limit the range of concerns which can be brought to public dialogue.

The historical-contextual common good is produced in modern societies characterized by pluralism. While this can be positive, as has been argued, group pluralism also has negative dimensions. Robert Dahl argues that group pluralism has the potential to reinforce inequalities, deform civic consciousness and distort the public agenda.[70] Groups are not only centers of ideas but also centers of power, the inequality of which can lead to some of the problems indicated. Niebuhr makes the point that the existence of plural centers of power can be both creative and destructive. He also argues that significant inequality of power produces injustice. The historical-contextual common good must be sensitive to existing dynamics of plural centers of ideas and power, trying to

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[69]Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in _Habermas and the Public Sphere_, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 129.

[70]Dahl, _Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy_, 40-53.

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foster the creative potential within those dynamics while mitigating their destructiveness.

Implied in this discussion of group pluralism is the reality of conflict. Conflict often characterizes the actual relationships between person and groups. Michael Perry makes the point that dialogue does not necessarily "solve" conflict. Furthermore, politics is more than dialogue.[71] As with pluralism itself, conflict can be creative or destructive.[72] Conflict and community are dynamically interrelated.[73] Conflict can contribute to the formation of a more just community, but it can also tear away at the fabric of the community.

That conflict and pluralism can be destructive, that the power of some can become inordinate, requires that a measure of coercive power be exercised in society to prevent the most destructive elements of group pluralism from gaining the upper hand.[74] This is an argument for the state as an organizing center of power. Society acting as a whole needs to be able to act for its common good. It does this by limiting corrosive conflict and destructive power relations. The state may also "provide

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[71]Perry, 124, 144.

[72]Williams, 91-92.

[73]Hollenbach, _Claims_, 164.

[74]Perry, 135-136.

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some of the conditions of mutuality in the common life."[75]
A state with sufficient power to act in these ways is
required by the historical-contextual common good, but
such a state poses a danger to that very common good. The
danger of having a state powerful enough to act for the
common good is that some group might come to control the
state and begin acting not for any common good but simply
for its own limited good. The state so controlled might
squeeze some of the lifeblood out of the political
community it governs. The historical-contextual common
good requires that institutions and procedures be
established that check inordinate state power.

The historical-contextual common good is achieved,
to what ever extent it is achieved, in the midst of
pluralism, conflict, and competing ideas of what is
required by the common good itself. Achievements of the
common good are genuinely good for all, but persons and
groups may experience the common good differently at
different times. It may be part of the common good that a
strong educational system be established, but those whose
taxes pay part of the cost may not experience this as part
of any common good. We might say that the recipe for the
common good at the historical-contextual level requires
that some eggs be broken.

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[75]Williams, 104.

The Common Good and Political Democracy

What does this sketch of a conception of the common good offer our search to locate an appropriate place for majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in an adequate normative conception of democracy? We argued that an examination of the common good might be fruitful for more adequately integrating these concerns. Let us remind ourselves of some of the differing concerns represented by majoritarian and minoritarian conceptions of democracy.

Among the normative principles and concerns that minority-protection conceptions of democracy tend to highlight are: 1) freedom as creative for social life, with an emphasis on freedom from constraint; 2) rights as protections against governmental tyranny and/or domination by others; 3) a limited political sphere with a strongly independent economic sphere; 4) "elite" political leadership; and 5) political decisions reached only after a broad consensus has been assured.

Minority-protection models of democracy also tend to support certain institutional patterns: 1) a constitutionally mandated, limited state; 2) majority rule but in the context of significant checks and balances; 3) the requirement for supermajorities or consociational decision-making at significant points in the political decision-making process; 4) a strong and independent judiciary to protect freedom and rights.

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Majoritarian conceptions of democracy also represent a certain configuration of normative concerns and institutional patterns. Among the significant normative concerns are: 1) political equality often translated into a notion of one person/one vote; 2) political participation; 3) rights as protection-from, but especially as preserving opportunities for participation; 4) the importance of governmental ability to decide.

The institutional patterns often associated with majoritarian democracy include: 1) tendencies toward party government or other mechanisms to promote the ability of the government to make decisions; 2) a less limited state with more openness to intervention in the economic sphere (fuzzier boundaries between the political and economic spheres); 3) majority rule with fewer checks in place.

How are these various concerns to be brought together in a conception of democracy formulated in light of the conception of the common good sketched above? As a response to this question we offer a sketch of a normative conception of political democracy which highlights certain important elements. We argue that the social ideal of the common good implies democracy as a social ideal. In our first chapter we identified political equality, popular sovereignty and political participation as the normative core of political democracy, as political theorists have considered it. The conception of the common good as

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sketched includes these ideas or normative principles conducive to these ideas. The on-going well-being of each person counts in the common good. The principle of justice includes a principle of equal respect for persons as created in the image of God. Each person ought to be offered opportunities for community and have the freedom to share in and shape the character of her or his communities, including the nation-state as a political community. Thus the good of community, and the principle of community include ideas conducive to popular sovereignty. Participation and sharing in the life of communities are features of the common good while also being features of democracy as a social ideal.

Democracy, as a social ideal, is helpfully considered a specification of the procedural dimension of the common good. Democracy in political communities defines the character of the processes through which aspects of the common good are more concretely defined and acted upon in policy formation and group and individual action. While we have discussed the procedural dimension of the common good at some length, it makes sense to focus on it here as a normative conception of democracy. Some additional shades of meaning are thereby brought out. We identify four aspects of "common-good democracy:" dialogue/deliberation, decisiveness, participation, and pluralism. We encountered these themes many times as we

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examined the conceptions of democracy offered by our theological ethicists. Here we attempt to relate these themes in light of our understanding of the common good as an overarching norm for the life of political communities.

Common-good democracy will be deliberative and dialogical. Yoder, Wogaman, Maritain and Sturm all included this as a dimension in their conceptions of democracy. Our previous discussion of ecumenical political dialogue characterized the dialogical nature of democracy. We will concentrate here on a sketch of political deliberation, and develop our sketch in dialogue with political theorist James Fishkin.

"Without deliberation, democratic choices are not exercised in a meaningful way."[76] Fishkin goes on to argue that political equality without deliberation is devalued, "for it amounts to nothing more than power without the opportunity to think about how that power ought to be exercised."[77]

Fishkin not only argues the need for democratic deliberation, he proposes a description of the process. He uses the idea of a "logically complete debate" as an ideal against which to measure deliberation. In a logically complete debate, participants raise proposals

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[76]James S. Fishkin, Democracy and Deliberation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 29. See also Hallowell, 120.

[77]Ibid., 36.

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and argue for them. Each participant considers the various arguments on their merits, listening with an openness to the variety of positions put forward. Such a process continues to the point where a decision is made. This deliberative ideal must be embodied in contexts where time is limited.[78]

The idea of deliberation, as developed here, adds to the idea of dialogue the element of an end point in decision. As Carol Gould notes,

> participation in decision-making through deliberation and debate constitutes a fundamental mode of the social interaction that characterizes individuals engaged in joint activity.[79]

Dialogue and deliberation are essential components of a normative conception of political democracy developed in light of the common good. Fostering and enhancing the ability of participants in dialogue to use language is important to democratic politics.

> Language is critical to democratic social change because, in the absence of wealth, without the support of tradition, and militarily weak, a democratic social movement depends upon political discourse as its synthesizing force.[80]

Common-good democracy is decisive. Dialogue and deliberation must come to temporary points of closure as

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[78]Ibid., 36-37.

[79]Gould, 239.

[80]Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Democracy and Capitalism (New York: Basic Books), 155.

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frequently as needed for policies conducive to the common good to be implemented. A theory of the state, as society acting as a whole, within our conception of the common good allows the state to be as powerful as is required for the common good to be furthered. Yet the common good which legitimates such state action also limits it. Morally, the state ought not act in ways contradictory to the principles which provide it moral legitimacy. Within the range of permitted action decisions need to be made and policies implemented to further the common good. Common-good democracy, as decisive, needs to have a decision-making rule compatible with dialogue and deliberation, as well as with other elements of the common good and democracy. Robert Dahl argues that decisiveness need not amount to majority rule.[81] He argues that majority rule has significant difficulties and works best in countries that have the following characteristics: 1) an important degree of homogeneity; 2) a strong expectation among political minority groups that they could be part of tomorrow's majority; and 3) confidence among political minorities that collective decisions will not fundamentally endanger crucial aspects of their way of life. Yet the alternatives to majority rule are equally problematic, e.g., supermajorities as decisive detract

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[81]Dahl, _Democracy and Its Critics_, Chapters 10-11.

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from political equality. Dahl concludes that "judgements as to the best rule for collective decisions ought to be made only after a careful appraisal of the circumstances in which these decisions are likely to be made."[82] While Dahl is skeptical about the possibility for a theoretical justification of majority rule as normative for democracy, others offer significant arguments for it.

Elaine Spitz's argument for majority rule involves a reexamination of the meaning of the concept itself. She argues that such an analysis illumines neglected aspects of the process. Spitz argues that majorities are not "arbitrary aggregations of hermits," but rather are people who share a common citizenship and a social space and time. Human beings are social and moral life depends upon joint activity. Human decisions reflect human related-ness.[83] Majorities of these social individuals are not for the most part preexistent, but must be formed, with political parties playing an important role.[84] Finally, Spitz argues that an adequate account of rule must take account of the entire policy-making process from issue development to revision, to decision, to implementation.

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[82]Ibid., 162.

[83]Spitz, Majority Rule, xii, 25, 212.

[84]Ibid., 80-84.

Each step in this process has something to do with "rule."[85]

With these interpretations of majorities and rule in mind, Spitz argues that majority rule is much more than a voting procedure. She claims that it is best considered a social practice with characteristic features such as free expression of ideas, discussion, negotiation, calculations of strategy, and voting on representatives and sometimes policies.[86] This social practice occurs "among related, politically equal people with shared as well as diverse interests and desires."[87] It encourages conflicting ideas under pressure to reach common resolution.[88] Spitz's theory can give a place to institutional checks within the political process, but it views them as a recognition of the fallibility of all sovereigns.[89]

Why should majority rule so described be part of a normative conception of political democracy? Spitz argues that

> In addition to promoting action while maintaining equality, liberty, and community, majority rule also fosters those feelings of fraternity without which voluntary participation in enterprises with others seldom occurs.[90]

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[85]Ibid., 82.

[86]Ibid., xiii, 211.

[87]Ibid., 211.

[88]Ibid., 214.

[89]Ibid., 120, n. 49.   [90]Ibid., 214.

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Furthermore, decisive resolution of political issues is crucial to a sense of political efficacy.[91]

Decisiveness may be a crucial factor in one's having a sense of political efficacy, and such decisiveness has to arise again and again for "in democratic politics all destinations are temporary."[92] As each decision is made we hope that it promotes the common good. The procedures by which decisions are made ought also reflect the common good, including decisiveness. Spitz offers a strong case for including majority rule in a normative conception of democracy. However, Dahl is probably right in arguing that when any political community decides on a decision rule it ought to take the wider socio-historical context into account. Spitz's own analysis lends itself to this conclusion. If majority rule is a social practice with many constituent parts, great harm might be done if, under the auspices of establishing majority rule, only part of the practice was institutionalized. Whether or not the full range of practices needed for majority rule can be established depends a great deal on the concrete socio-historical circumstances in which one hopes to establish this social practice. The crucial element for common-good democracy is that it be decisive. Majority rule, as defined by Spitz can be incorporated into common-good

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[91]Ibid., 151.

[92]Walzer, Spheres, 310. See also Spitz, 88.

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democracy as a social ideal, but this will not necessarily translate into simple majority rule within every historical-contextual embodiment of democracy.

Common-good democracy is participatory. This principle played an important role in the democratic conceptions of Wogaman, Maritain, and Sturm. As we dealt with the theme of participation in our discussion of the common good, our discussion here will be brief, with a focus on political participation. James Fishkin has argued that political participation may enhance political equality and political deliberation.[93] However, the degree of political participation available in modern nation-states is limited and the means for increasing it are complex.[94] Furthermore, Michael Walzer argues the value of a degree of nonparticipation in political life. Even in the best of societies, many citizens will choose not to be active political participants. Nonparticipants have rights; they also have a function within society. Nonparticipants will be able to offer effective criticisms of the policies developed by those who are active in the political process.[95]

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[93]Fishkin, 52-53.

[94]Pennock, 456-460. Dahl, Democracy, 217, 338-341.

[95]Walzer, "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen" in Obligations (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 234, 237-238.

While common-good democracy advocates increased
political participation in a way congruent with Walzer's
views, it also advocates more general participation in
other communities. It advocates an enriched public life,
a theme encountered in Maritain and Sturm. "Different
models of democracy... are congruent with, and require,
different kinds of society."[96] Common-good democracy
requires a more participatory social life. Participation
in terms of self-development need not be political
participation. Yet the skills and relational patterns
developed by participation in other associations can carry
over into political life.[97]

Common-good democracy is pluralist. We encountered
this theme in Novak, Wogaman, Maritain and Niebuhr. Once
again our previous discussion provides much of the
necessary material here. Let us reiterate that this
dimension of common good democracy is not simply a
concession to modernity, but is based on the potential
value of pluralism. A pluralistic society has within it a
variety of valuable centers of ideas, experiments, et. al.
that can enhance life together. A plurality of groups
within society provides possibilities for more intense
participation with others, with the attendant benefits

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[96]Macpherson, Life and Times, 6.

[97]Spitz, 19, 127.

which have political possibilities as well. No group is
an island, however. We all participate in the wider
society and those larger social relations have an impact
on persons and groups which are more positive or negative.
We need those who carry community ideas and experiences
into the political process.

Common-good democracy as deliberative, decisive,
participatory, and pluralist attempts to incorporate
majoritarian and minoritarian concerns in a significantly
integrative fashion. We suggest four of these integrative
patterns below.

(1) Common-good democracy suggests that a state's
power ought to be limited either constitutionally or by
self-limitation. The limits, however, are prescribed by
normative principles which also justify decisive state
action. Freedom and justice are not necessarily pitted
against one another, but together define the scope and
limits of state action.[98]

(2) Institutional arrangements typically considered
minoritarian can be part of the democratic politics of
common-good democracy. The justification of such
arrangements is based on: 1) the need to foster
deliberation in a way that includes the concerns of all
persons and groups, and 2) the need to protect persons and

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[98]Gould, 238.

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groups from domination in recognition of the sinfulness and fallibility of persons. Such institutional arrangements must be evaluated in terms of those ends. With these considerations in mind, one might, for example, construct an argument against the filibuster rule in the United States Senate. One could argue that this rule seems to function more as an impediment to deliberation and decision than as a help to deliberation and a protection against domination.

(3) Participation, generally promoted by majoritarian models, in this conception of democracy is seen as relating majoritarian and minoritarian concerns along the lines developed by Elizabeth Wolgast. The view of participation developed here, and by Wolgast, rests on a social conception of the human person, one who "sees himself partly through a larger community, one who wants to participate in the community as part of his self-development."[99] When persons vote, then, they vote not only their own interests but also their views of what would be good for society. The social person must be protected, not simply as an individual with private interests but as a potentially important participant in the political process and in public life more

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[99]Elizabeth Wolgast, The Grammar of Justice (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 65-66.

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generally.[100] For Wolgast, democratic government involves majority rule within a context of participatory institutions.[101] Through these institutions, justice and the common good must be pursued continuously "in specific and changing circumstances."[102]

(4) The decisiveness associated with majoritarian democracy is also a feature of common-good democracy. Majority rule is given a degree of normative force, but the majorities formed are to be deliberative majorities. By their very nature such majorities are based on the recognition of the other as an equal, with value in her or his own right, and with valuable insights to contribute to public life.

Common-good democracy, represents an attempt to integrate majoritarian and minoritarian principles, analogously to the way in which the common good tries to integrate a wide variety of political-ethical principles. This conception of democracy not only relates these various concerns deeply, but also criticizes conceptions of democracy, majoritarian and minoritarian, which are based primarily on an atomistic view of persons.

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[100]Ibid., 67.

[101]Ibid., 73.

[102]Ibid., 76.

> Political behavior is not aggregated atomistic
> activity.... Utility for a majority turns on the
> achievement of its purpose, the peaceful acceptance of
> a common action, and not the wishes of people
> considered as a combination of hermits.[103]

Common-good democracy is a normative social ideal.
It seeks to demonstrate certain compatibilities between
the normative principles which ground majoritarian and
minoritarian democracy, when these principles are shaped
by, and interpreted within a conception of the common
good. Persons who find this a persuasive ideal will seek
its embodiment in socio-historical contexts, that is, in
actually existing political and governmental institutions.
Common-good democracy is an ideal for processes by which a
society acting as a whole (the state) makes its collective
decisions. Just as the social ideal of the common good
will only be approximately realized in a historical-
contextual common good, so it is with common-good
democracy. Approximate realizations of this democratic
ideal are all we can expect in the midst of societies
characterized by conflict and pluralism, with their
creative and destructive potentials.

While we argue that common-good democracy as a
social ideal coherently relates majoritarian and
minoritarian principles and recognizes certain

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[103]Spitz, 201-202.

compatibilities between them, we are not ignoring the tensions that can also exist between the differing normative concerns represented in these two conceptions of democracy. Such tensions are particularly evident in concrete socio-historical situations. Within history we might expect enduring tensions between majoritaraian and minority-protections concerns. In establishing democratic governments, one must be sensitive to the socio-historical context and construct institutional arrangements that embody the concern of common-good democracy to keep majoritarian concerns, which function to remind us of the need to enable society to be a decision-making community, and minoritarian concerns, which function to remind us of the need to protect persons from domination, together in a creative and dynamic tension.

This point can be illustrated by considering Lani Guinier's recently published book. As the title of her book indicates, she is concerned with "the tyranny of the majority." She argues that "even a self-interested majority can govern fairly if it cooperates with the minority."[104] She calls majorities that rule but do not dominate "Madisonian majorities." Majorities of this kind are shifting majorities where cooperation between the majority and minority is fostered because those in the

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[104]Lani Guinier, The Tyranny of the Majority, 3-4.

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majority recognize that they might soon be among the
minority. Madisonian majorities accommodate the
democratic ideal which values self-government, fairness,
deliberation, compromise and consensus. Such majorities
promote "a fair discussion among self-defined equals about
how to achieve our common aspirations."[105] This descrip-
tion of the democratic ideal seems compatible with common-
good democracy.

Guinier's focus, however, is on U.S. socio-political
life. She argues that "in a racially divided society,
majority rule may be perceived as majority tyranny." Put
another way, if a group is not fairly represented in
political life, and if conventional majority-forming
processes do not adequately redress this unfairness,
alternatives to such processes may need to be formulated
and implemented.[106] Guinier proposes a principle of
"taking turns." Her model is children at play. When
children play, they decide what to play in such a way that
while the game the majority wants to play is played first
and more often, the other game also gets played. Even
with this in mind, Guinier argues that "taking turns" in
political life does not mean that a minority rules, but
that it gets to influence decision-making and makes the

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[105]Ibid., 4-6.

[106]Ibid., 3, 5.

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majority rule more legitimately. The principle of taking-turns represents an equal opportunity to influence legislative outcomes.[107]

Some of the proposals Guinier advocates as concrete embodiments of taking turns include cumulative voting and supermajorities, with the applicability of any such measures to be determined within specific circumstances. In cumulative voting, each voter gets a number of votes, say to match the number of alternative proposals being presented. Small groups who feel intensely about certain options can aggregate their votes in such a way as to have their intensity reflected in the decision-making process and its outcome. Supermajority voting means that decisions must wait until larger majorities are formed, thus giving minorities, including traditionally excluded minorities, an effective veto and thus a larger role in decision-making.[108]

Guinier's goals are primarily to see that all perspectives are adequately represented in political decison-making, and that all can meaningfully participate in public dialogue.[109] Her primary point, in terms of democratic theory, could be either that majority rule is illegitimate as a norm or that it is illegitimate under

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[107]Ibid., 2, 5, 14.

[108]Ibid., 14-17.

[109]Ibid., 6, 7, 14, 19.

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certain social conditions and when it operates in certain
ways. If it is the latter, then her criticisms are not
necessarily criticisms of normative theory but are
historical-contextual criticisms, and her concrete
proposals can be interpreted as remedial measures rather
than as an alternative normative model. Her normative
ideal and her desire to see an increase in meaningful
participation and in the adequacy with which various
perspectives are represented in political life are
consistent with common-good democracy. Yet her remedial
solutions seem to suggest that another normative ideal,
more minoritarian in character, is operative.

Put another way, are Guinier's remedial solutions
consistent enough with the democratic ideal to which she
appeals? A number of issues can be raised. We might ask
whether "taking turns" in the way Guinier describes this
actually undercuts values of consensus and community it is
designed to foster. Where should lines be drawn with
respect to excluded groups? Guinier makes a strong case
that certain groups within the United States, e.g.
African-Americans, have been underrepresented, but great
care must be taken in the measures one uses to promote
inclusion. Other groups might take undue advantage of
mechanisms designed to promote the inclusion of
traditionally excluded groups. Minority veto powers can
be exercised by powerful minorities who benefit from the

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status quo as well as by traditionally dominated groups. In considering access and influence in the political process, one must view the entire policy-making process and not simply the electoral processes, important as they are.[110] One final issue to raise about Guinier's concrete proposals is that complex decision-making processes may undercut the ability to make decisions which promote justice for traditionally dominated groups. Such processes may result in stalemate or gridlock.

The point of this analysis of Guinier has been (1) to argue the need to take contextual realities seriously in establishing or reforming political institutions in light of common-good democracy, and (2) to demonstrate that particularly within socio-historical life, tensions will exist between majoritarian and minoritarian concerns. Guinier rightly raises a significant issue for U.S. democracy, i.e., the underrepresentation of racial minorities in democratic processes. Common-good democracy takes this concern seriously. Certain institutional adjustments may be necessary. However, in light of the concern of common-good democracy to hold majoritarian and minoritarian concerns together, even if in tension, we question her

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[110]See Steven Kelman, Making Public Policy (New York: Basic Books, 1987) for an informative discussion of the entire policy-making process in the U.S.

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specific proposals for remedial measures. However, there may be circumstances in which some of her ideas might seem fitting and ought to be tried.

Guinier's work also serves to remind us of the tensions which exist within history between certain implications of moral principles. A tension may exist between political justice promoting inclusion in political processes, and substantive justice resulting from policy decisions. Minority vetoes may promote meaningful participation, but they may prevent just policies from being implemented.

Common-good democracy does not specify a single set of institutional arrangements for its embodiment in concrete socio-historical contexts, though the range is not unlimited. Instead, it prescribes certain qualities which ought to characterize any set of political-institutional arrangements, and it focuses debates about the normative adequacy of any set of such institutions. The reality is that we find ourselves within particular political contexts with their histories, traditions, and institutions. The normative ideal of common-good democracy ought to be approximately realized within these contexts. While no single set of institutional arrange-ments suffices to capture the full ideal of common-good democracy we can explore the shape of approximate reali-zations of our normative conception of democracy. We

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return to democratic political theory for some
suggestions.

The social ideal of common-good democracy will fit
more comfortably with some contextual-institutional models
than with others. Let us consider Joseph Schumpeter's
model of democracy. Schumpeter argues that democracy
ought to be viewed as competition among leaders to
determine who will possess the power to make decisions for
society. The role of the wider group of citizens is to
elect a government. Once the people have elected their
leaders they ought to stand back and let their leaders
govern. Schumpeter even cautions the people against
succumbing to the temptation to write letters of advice to
their elected officials.[111] Whatever descriptive power
this model might possess, it is deficient from the
normative perspective developed here. It effectively
discourages broad political participation and tends to
mute significant political dialogue among citizens.

Common-good democracy is not opposed to developing
political representation and political leadership in
historical-political life. Democracy in modern nation-
states requires a representative system of government.
Within such a system it is the representatives who must
finally decide on policy alternatives. The relevant

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[111]Schumpeter, <u>Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy</u>
(New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1950), 269, 272, 293.

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questions, given our normative conception of democracy, include questions about the processes by which representatives are chosen to run for election; the way in which districts are drawn or proportionate representation determined; the nature of political parties; the nature of the policy-making process as a whole and the openings in that process for citizen input; the opportunities for representatives to hear and consider the views of ordinary citizens. In responding to such questions we would ask whether the processes in place adequately embody the principles of dialogue/deliberation, decisiveness, participation and pluralism. How might the political system be reformed to more adequately realize the values represented by these principles? We would need to examine results and not simply rhetoric. For instance, political devices such as initiative, referendum and recall have a prima facie appeal, given our normative conception of democracy. However, in actual practice these political methods pose difficulties. As Thomas Cronin writes, "the side with more money too often gets to define the issue and structure the debate in an unbalanced way."[112] Analogous questions might be raised about political primaries as a way to choose candidates to represent political parties in elections for office. Here again, a

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[112]Thomas E. Cronin, Direct Democracy: The Politics of Initiative, Referendum, and Recall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 226.

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prima facie normative appeal for primary elections exists. However, one might argue here, as in initiative, referendum and recall, that candidates with the most money and name recognition have an unfair advantage, decreasing the real value of deliberation regarding acceptable candidates. One might argue, then, that allowing parties to choose their own candidates ultimately promotes deliberation and works in the direction of making government more decisive. One would have to argue, as well, that the processes by which parties choose their candidates need to be relatively open to broad participation.

If all of these questions remain open, what does it matter that we developed our normative conception of common-good democracy? Our normative conception helps both to structure the debate about issues such as these, and to characterize the debating process itself. The principles of common-good democracy provide us with criteria for judging actually existing democratic systems. Debate about the normative adequacy of any political democracy and its institutions should be centered on these principles. At the same time, the nature of the dialogue should be characterized by tolerance, by openness to the views of others, by the broad inclusion of others, and by arguments that are publicly accessible and intelligible. Furthermore, the normative conception of common-good democracy finds other contextual-institutional models

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of political democracy more congenial than Schumpeter's. Robert Dahl's democratic theory, as developed in his recent work <u>Democracy and Its Critics</u> offers one such model. We introduced some important aspects of Dahl's democratic theory in our first chapter. We explore it more fully here.

Dahl argues that the core of any conception of democracy is the vision of

> a political system in which members regard one another as political equals, are collectively sovereign, and possess all the capacities, resources, and institutions they need in order to govern themselves.[113]

In contrast to this ideal vision, democracy as a reality within history has been conceived of in terms of certain institutions and practices, a body of rights, a social and economic order, a system of guaranteeing certain results, or a process for making collective decisions.[114] Dahl opts for viewing democracy as a process for making collective and binding decisions. After all, the democratic ideal of rule by the people entails the idea of decision-making.[115]

From this formal definition of democracy as a decision-making process, Dahl goes on to specify five criteria which serve as standards for identifying

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[113]Dahl, <u>Democracy and Its Critics</u>, 2.

[114]Ibid., 111.

[115]Ibid., 5, 106.

decision-making procedures as democratic. These five

criteria are: effective participation, voting equality at

the decisive stage, enlightened understanding, final

control of the agenda, and inclusion. These five

criteria, when present beyond some minimum in a decision-

making process identify that process as democratic. Dahl

argues that no political system in the "real world" will

fully meet the criteria for a democratic process. This is

a degrees-of-democracy approach.[116]

Dahl argues that these criteria together not only

identify a democratic process but also specify the meaning

of political equality.[117] This connection becomes clearer

when we explore the meaning of each criterion. Effective

participation means that persons ought to have adequate

and equal opportunities for putting items on the agenda,

stating their reasons for supporting one position or

another, and expressing their preferences for the final

outcome. Voting equality at the decisive stage is a

straight-forward idea. When it comes time to decide,

everyone ought to be able to express their choice and that

choice ought to be counted equally with the choices of

others. Dahl's concept of enlightened understanding is

that

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[116]Ibid., 109-115, 129-131.

[117]Ibid., 130.

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> each citizen ought to have adequate and equal
> opportunities for discovering and validating (within
> the time permitted by the need for a decision) the
> choice on the matter to be decided that would best
> serve the citizen's interests.[118]

Final control of the agenda means that members of a

democratic association have the opportunity to decide how

matters are to be placed on the decision-making agenda.

Inclusion means that all adult members of an association

(citizens) shall have the opportunities prescribed in the

other criteria.

It should be clear why Dahl claims that these

criteria specify the meaning of political equality. A

concept of human equality, which can support political

equality is also an important aspect of the common good

and common-good democracy. Dahl's criteria for a

democratic process fit very comfortably with our normative

conception of common-good democracy. Dahl's view of

democracy is participative, as is common-good democracy.

Voting equality can be related to decisiveness, as can

final control of the agenda. Enlightened understanding is

often enhanced by the presence of plural points of view,

and the idea of inclusion is bound to encompass a

plurality of groups. Dahl's overall view of democracy as

a decision-making process would also fit with our under-

standing of common-good democracy, though we place

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[118]Ibid., 112.

democracy within the context of other substantive values that ought to characterize human social life. Dahl's conception of the common good is that "ordinarily it consists of the practices, arrangements, institutions, and processes that... promote the well-being of ourselves and others."[119] We might also assume that Dahl rightly finds the common good embodied in the results of democratic processes as well. The moral principles and values that provide democracy its moral legitimacy should also be embodied in the substantive policies of the state.

While at an ideal level Dahl's conception of democracy and our conception of common-good democracy are clearly compatible, the real value of Dahl's work to our project is the way in which he seeks to apply his theory to democracy as it might exist in historical-political associations. While existing decision-making processes in modern states will not embody the five democratic criteria in a full sense, they can be partially realized. Dahl argues that such partial realizations require a certain set of institutional structures which he terms "polyarchy." Polyarchy, "a set of political institutions necessary to large-scale democracy," is comprised of the following seven institutions and practices: elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage,

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[119]Ibid., 307.

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almost universal right to run for office, freedom of

expression, availability of alternative sources of

information, and associational autonomy. These

institutions and practices are formed in the midst of

modern societies characterized by diversity, conflict and

pluralism.[120]

Dahl correlates these institutions and practices

with his five criteria for a democratic process. Voting

equality requires the election of officials in free and

fair elections. Effective participation is facilitated by

the election of officials, inclusive suffrage, the right

to run for office, freedom of expression, the avail-

ability of alternative sources of information, and associ-

ational autonomy. Three of these same institutions

facilitate enlightened understanding: freedom of expres-

sion, alternative sources of information and associational

autonomy. Having elected officials, free and fair elec-

tions, inclusive suffrage, the right to run for office,

freedom of expression, alternative information, and

associational autonomy contributes to final control of the

agenda. Inclusion is facilitated by inclusive suffrage,

the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alter-

native information, and associational autonomy.[121] None

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[120]Ibid., 217-221.

[121]Ibid., 222.

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of the democratic criteria are fully realized by their associated set of polyarchical institutions and practices.

Critical appropriation of Dahl's democratic theory as an effort to embody common-good democracy provides some distinct moral action-guides for political life. Our conception of common-good democracy provides support for Dahl's democratic criteria, and by implication, for the institutions and practices of polyarchy as historical-contextual embodiments of common-good democracy. Common-good democracy serves as a source for critical examination of these institutions. It does not simply legitimate the status quo. One must always ask whether polyarchy continues to serve common-good democracy or whether it takes on a life of its own in ways that work against the democratic ideal. One can ask how polyarchy can be improved to serve democracy and the common good more adequately. The presence of substantive outcomes of policy-making processes that do not adequately serve justice, freedom and community, or legislative bodies that do not offer opportunities for significant viewpoints to be heard may indicate that significant flaws exist in the current democratic processes.[122] As we argued early on, the general failure of the Christian political ethicists we have examined to think through a normative conception

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[122]Guinier, 14.

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of democracy mitigated their ability to give such direction with regard to establishing, supporting and reforming political democracies. Hopefully more of that ability has been reclaimed.

Concluding Comments

> If the state's functioning well has some kind of theological importance attached to it, then Christians have theological reasons for wanting to assure that it does function well."[123]

We have argued that a morally legitimate state would be a democratic state. Thus we might say that if a democracy's functioning well has some kind of theological importance attached to it, then Christians have theological reasons for wanting to assure that it does function well. We have tried to develop theological reasons for political democracy in formulating an understanding of the common good which shapes a conception of democracy neither simply majoritarian nor minoritarian, but establishing a deep relationship between certain aspects of each. The common good has a long history in Christian theological ethics. The idea of the common good represents a Christian conviction that the larger social world is important. It has been argued here that action in the world has penultimate significance, that approximate realizations of God's purposes within history contribute to the full

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[123]Wogaman, Christian Perspectives, 45.

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realization of God's purposes in the Kingdom of God.
Within this understanding, the common good not only
represents a conviction that human life within history is
important, but that because it is important it ought to
embody, to whatever extent is possible in the midst of
human sin, deeply held Christian moral principles such as
justice, covenant/community, respect for persons as
created in the image of God, and freedom. The common good
provides normative justification for democracy conceived
in relation to the common good. When common-good
democracy as a form of political democracy characterizes
governmental politics, the state becomes more completely
an organizing center of power for the common good. We
have theological reasons to work for and struggle for
better democracy. We sought to foster a more adequate
dialogue with democratic political theory to help give
direction to our struggle for democracy. The precise
nature of that struggle will be determined in on-going
discussion, dialogue and deliberation. Christians join in
the struggle for democracy inspired by the idea that such
work has ultimate significance.

> In the eschatological image of the city, we have the
> assurance that our efforts to make these present
> cities of ours humane places in which to live –
> efforts which are so often frustrated, efforts which
> so often lead to despair - will, by way of the
> mysterious patterns of history, eventually provide
> tiles and timbers for a city of delight.[124]

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[124]Wolterstorff, 140.

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