Introduction

In contemporary politics and political theory, democracy is often asso-
ciated with *descriptive representation*. Whether it goes under this name or
such cognate labels as the "politics of presence," "indicative" representa-
tion, or simply "group" representation, it has become commonplace to
treat concern about the presence of a range of social groups in legislatures
and other institutions as intrinsic to a commitment to democracy itself.
Today, anxieties about a "democratic deficit" often stem from a worry that
the composition of political bodies does not reflect the important divisions
within society at large.[1]

However familiar it is at present, the association of descriptive repre-
sentation with democracy is not timeless. In the Victorian era, a formative
period for the development both of the modern state and of democratic
theory, the ideal of descriptive representation was at its apex – but it was
largely claimed by opponents of democracy. In the famous clashes over
parliamentary reform of the period, the impression that democracy was
incompatible with a fair and socially inclusive assembly – with a House of
Commons that could constitute "the mirror of the nation" – was formid-
able and widespread.

Instead of these aims being clearly aligned with a democratic self-
conception, adherents to the ideal of a *mirroring* parliament tended to
subscribe to one of three main paradigms. The first of these schools – and

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[1] E.g. Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford, 1995); Philip Pettit, "Varieties of Public
Representation," in *Political Representation*, ed. Ian Shapiro, Susan Stokes, Elisabeth Jean Wood,
and Alexander Kirshner (Cambridge, 2009): 61–89; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*
(Oxford, 2000); Pablo de Greiff, "Deliberative Democracy and Group Representation," *Social
Theory and Practice*, 26 (2000): 397–415; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal
Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford, 1996). Beyond the confines of academic theory, the purchase of
descriptive representation is even greater. In public discourse, appeals to the premises of descriptive
representation in assessing the satisfactoriness of assemblies and other governmental bodies have long
been ubiquitous; e.g. David Judge, *Representation: Theory and Practice in Britain* (London,
1999), ch. 2.

the one which held sway at the midway point of the nineteenth century –
was what I call the *variety-of-suffrages* school. Authors in this camp put
forward plans for electoral reform that deliberately varied the suffrage
across constituencies in order to ensure seats in the House of Commons
for different classes, interest groups, and ideological movements. This
variation in electoral regulation was valued for the sake of protecting and
including diversity. To these writers, the variety of suffrages was the
true *liberal* mode of regulating the vote, because it ensured that all of the
"classes, interests, and opinions" that constituted their diverse society had
spokesmen in Parliament. These thinkers were not only devoted to an ideal
of descriptive representation; they also believed that their proposals
accorded with English constitutional history, a major legacy of which
was a suffrage variegated across different constituencies and justified on
the grounds that this arrangement generated an assembly that was an
"epitome" of the diverse civil body. In contrast, a uniform suffrage entailed
bestowing an illiberal hegemony on only one part of the body politic. If the
requirements for the vote were restrictive (what they called *oligarchy*), only
the opinions of an upper class would be included. Conversely, if all
property thresholds or special requirements for the franchise were abol-
ished (what they called *democracy*, or "one man, one vote" in equal
districts), the working classes or other majority groups, by virtue of their
vast numbers, would outvote or "swamp" the other elements in society and
lead to their exclusion from the assembly. Beyond simply being unfair to
those excluded, such uniform suffrages would impair deliberation in the
Commons by diminishing the range of ideas heard, thus rendering debate
"partial." And this parliamentary deliberation was of indispensable signifi-
cance, since they believed that a broader deliberative polity – the only kind
in which progress, freedom, sound policy, and the formation of a real
public opinion were possible – could not exist unless the highest
representative institution itself operated in a deliberative manner.

Against this ascendant outlook, a second paradigm emerged for thinking
about the meaning and mechanics of a mirroring assembly: *democratic
theory*. Two discrete paths were followed by advocates of a more demo-
cratic franchise who attacked the variety of suffrages on its own terms.
The first was to affirm either that the working class contained a variety of
opinions, or that the demos possessed qualities and characteristics that
were in keeping with the preservation of diversity and deliberation.
Therefore, its full admission to the suffrage posed no threat of "swamping"
other sections of society or of eliminating the contestation among view-
points that gave the assembly its deliberative character. The second, more

radical democratic response was to deny that concern for social and ideological diversity had any place in the evaluation or design of electoral-representative structures. For these democrats, descriptive representation and democracy were opposed and irreconcilable principles. Democracy was, in their eyes, a happy escape from a tradition of mirroring whose prescriptions they judged to be arbitrary and unfair.

The final normative-institutional vision of a mirroring parliament was *the theory of proportional representation* (PR). Neither the motivation for devising the scheme of the single transferable vote championed by Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill, nor the truly stunning range of moral, epistemic, and social benefits predicted from its implementation, can be adequately understood in isolation from the anxious quest for a reform which would increase the inclusivity of the electoral system without causing the Commons to become unrepresentative and undeliberative. PR was supposed, by many of its backers, to square this circle, to provide an electoral system which could yield an assembly that was a mirror of society in its diversity even under a uniform (and probably at some point, they thought, universal) suffrage. However, PR was not a simple reconciliation of descriptivism with suffrage-uniformity or democracy; in contrast to a current view which sees PR as the form par excellence of descriptive representation, both Victorian supporters and critics of PR were acute about the ways in which Hare and other proportionalists were departing from traditional descriptivism even as they sought to remain faithful to many of the ideas of parliamentarianism that undergirded it. While a delicate give-and-take with rival schools of thought about mirroring went into its theorization, ultimately Victorian PR constituted an integral political theory in its own right, built on the foundations of *electoral liberty* and *voluntary association* and accompanied by a unique moral-political outlook. This outlook, in turn, provoked a cogent set of criticisms from theorists and commentators who came to see the plurality-rule system as essential to a vital, contestatory, and progressive democratic society.

This book aims to reconstruct and analyze the ideal of the mirroring parliament during its Victorian apogee, and to depict the contest among these rival visions about the meaning and institutions of deliberative, descriptively-representative government. As the first history of the theory of mirroring representation in the nineteenth century, it is my hope that this book will allow us to rethink the intellectual-ideological contours of the political thought of the period. The political, social, and economic history of parliamentary reform has been well-studied, but its intellectual

history remains underserved. Furthermore, to the extent that the intellectual side of reform has been treated, it is other sets of arguments that have garnered the most attention. The wealth of theorizing and institutional design that took place under the heading of diversity and mirroring has remained strangely understudied. Importantly, some political historians who take the history of ideas seriously have noted that beliefs about the representation of classes and interests, or about the opposition between democracy and representative government, played a significant role in the debates about parliamentary reform.[2] But they have not attempted a systematic analysis of the theory of mirroring representation or tried to give a philosophical reconstruction of these debates. Moreover, such histories have tended to neglect the place of PR. In turn, the few historical treatments of the British PR movement have not been concerned to elaborate how much the invention and theorization of PR owed to the intense conversation around the ideal of a mirroring Commons, but have instead focused on explaining why PR did not win out in the party-political machinations around electoral reform in Britain.[3] As a result, the important ways in which PR both drew from and broke with the conceptual and normative universe of Victorian descriptive representation have gone unexamined. This lacuna is particularly unfortunate, both because PR is a major institution of modern representative democracy on the nature and genealogy of which it is important to reflect, and because its invention and promulgation was a force whose shaping effect on the development of modern political thought has received insufficient consideration.

Restoring mirroring representation to a central place in nineteenth-century political thought adds fresh layers of nuance and context to some familiar political-philosophic themes, such as the tensions between democracy *and* representation and between democracy *and* liberalism. When a conflict between democracy and representation is invoked, what is often meant is that in a democracy the "will of the people" acts in some sense directly, while in a representative system it is mediated by an intervening set of officials and institutions. But historically there was another

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[2] See the excellent volumes by Robert Saunders (*Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848–1867* [Farnham, 2011]) and Angus Hawkins (*Victorian Political Culture, 'Habits of Heart and Mind'* [Oxford, 2015]). Both have been invaluable resources for me.

[3] As in Jenifer Hart's *Proportional Representation: Critics of the British Electoral System, 1820–1945* (Oxford, 1992). The only work in the history of political thought concentrated on Victorian PR is Floyd Parsons's *Thomas Hare and Political Representation in Victorian Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2009). I have benefited greatly from both of these works.

important way of seeing the conflict – namely, as a conflict between a representative government, which contained securities against a "part," however large, speaking for a diverse "whole," and a democracy, which did not. In this respect this book participates in a growing theoretical literature which resists treating representative government as simply a mode of instantiating democracy and instead understands the former as having a distinct historical and theoretical basis which ideas of democracy then came to modify.[4] Similarly, when theorists speak of a tension between democracy and liberalism, what they typically have in mind is that the popular will can conflict with individual rights. Yet there has been another important manner of conceiving the tension between democracy and liberalism, where the clash is wholly internal to the electoral-representative sphere: for many Victorians, the heart of the matter in parliamentary reform was whether "true liberalism" or "democracy" would come to characterize the future of the English representation.

Along related lines, an understanding of Victorian debates about mirroring can offer alternative perspectives on trends and assumptions in contemporary political theory. As I have already noted, democratic theory has witnessed a growth of sympathy for descriptive representation, and the practice of many democratic governments has been to implement descriptivist devices such as quotas or special constituencies for particular groups. And yet little attention has been paid to the fact that descriptive representation has no intrinsic connection to democracy. Depending on one's underlying sociological presuppositions, one may be led to endorse electoral arrangements that are distinctly undemocratic while remaining faithful to the principle of descriptive representation. Indeed, although proponents of descriptive representation today are counted in the democratic ranks, historically this affiliation is the exception rather than the rule. There is a corresponding parallel with the great wave of "deliberative democracy" in contemporary theory: while deliberation has been a core commitment of nearly all theories of representative government for the last two centuries at least, its connection with democracy has been far more tenuous.

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[4] E.g. Mónica Brita Vieiro and David Runciman, *Representation* (Cambridge, 2008); David Plotke, "Representation Is Democracy," *Constellations*, 4 (1997): 19–34; Bryan Garsten, "Representative Government and Popular Sovereignty," in Shapiro et al. (eds), *Political Representation*, 90–110.

This book was not written in order to exemplify any particular method of doing either intellectual history or political theory – at least not consciously. Nonetheless, the reader is entitled to an account of the basic convictions orienting the author's research and writing. Indeed, I do subscribe to a few notions which might grandly be called *quasi-methodological*, insofar as they shaped how I conceived of this project and motivated me to present it as I have done – although perhaps it would be more accurate to describe them as articles of faith.

Cardinal among these is the belief that that there need be no trade-off between history and theory. That "history is a laboratory for arguments" and can thereby enrich political theory is an old saw,[5] although it is no less true for its familiarity. But I would push the thought even further: the more history, I would suggest, the better the laboratory. The more fine-grained our historical knowledge, the more urgently and clearly the arguments, problems, and debates of the past can speak to current dilemmas and questions. In other words, a major reason to plunge deeply into the historical context of political thought is precisely (if paradoxically) because one is aiming to produce a piece of writing that is *not* solely of historical value.[6] Whether this book itself affirms this conviction about the mutually beneficial connection between historical and theoretical research, only the reader can decide. That such a harmony or synergy should exist, however, is not accidental, but stems from two truths about our political thinking.

The first is that political thought – and especially that political thought which draws heavily from and in turn impacts the surrounding political culture – is an ensemble rather than a star-driven production. Hence, our understanding of political ideas becomes richer by allowing a greater number of actors onto the stage.[7] Without casting our net so widely, it is too easy to imagine that certain canonical ideas were the only ones on offer, or to attribute to them a triumph that they may, in fact, never have achieved; and a certain amount of mischaracterization and lack of nuance in evaluating particular arguments or outlooks becomes almost inevitable. A thicker reconstruction of the public debate of an historical period, featuring a deeper roster of thinkers, therefore serves as an aid to reflection

[5] E.g. Jürgen Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure," in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA, 1996): 463–90.

[6] E.g. Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), vii.

[7] Jan-Werner Müller's label of "in-between figures" applies well to many of the *dramatis personae* of this book; Müller, "The Triumph of What (If Anything)? Rethinking Political Ideologies and Political Institutions in Twentieth-Century Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 14 (2009): 211–26.

on the relations between different concepts, values, and institutional arrangements.

A second way in which history of political thought can enhance political theory is that it can focus our minds on the shape and significance of specific institutions. Political theory has recently heard calls to be more attentive to the actual institutions by which politics is conducted.[8] History has much to contribute to such a project. In both public discourse and political philosophy it can be difficult not to take for granted the existent institutional backdrop, not to let an assumption of its permanence or naturalness inflect our thinking in myriad ways of which we are seldom fully aware.[9] A richer historicization of political thought is one means by which to avoid being complacent about institutional matters or leaving them in the background of our theorizations of politics, for it forces us to confront the concrete institutional forms in light of which past thinkers developed their views about justice, equality, representation, etc. Historical inquiry often provides, from the perspective of the present, a sense of mismatch – we find institutions unlike those with which we are familiar being justified in the name of values or ends which resonate with us, or, vice versa, we discover institutions similar or identical to our own being defended on grounds not widely known or accepted today – and this sense can be productive of fresh thinking about the nature of our political structures. For this reason, history can mediate between the institutional and the normative, the particular and the abstract, in a way that is productive for political theory; it can open up avenues by which broad normative and conceptual problems can be credibly connected to the nitty-gritty of institutional design and evaluation.

These general rules likely do not apply universally; there probably are historical settings that have no light to shed on certain current questions. But if there are exceptions, Victorian Britain is not one of them. The Victorian era was marked by an extraordinary richness of thought about politics which has been underserved by political theorists, in part out of a too-exclusive focus on John Stuart Mill. A tremendous outpouring of writing about liberty, democracy, the state, empire, and many other issues which remain live today contributed to a highly rationalistic public sphere

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[8] Jeremy Waldron, *Political Political Theory: Essays on Institutions* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

[9] E.g. the warning of the pluralist historian and philosopher J. N. Figgis that "nearly every system which professes to be deduced from general philosophical principles will be found on investigation to bear a very close relation to the facts of some existing government"; Figgis, "William Warburton," in *Typical English Churchmen from Parker to Maurice*, ed. William Collins (London, 1902), 215–56, at 232.

in which political and intellectual life were closely imbricated.[10] Spurred on by a sense that they lived in an age of transition in which the bases of society and government appeared uncertain and open to challenge, a wide array of thinkers entered the public fray in self-conscious dialogue with one another to tackle fundamental questions. Going beyond the relatively thin cast of nineteenth-century British philosophers (Bentham, the Mills, perhaps T. H. Green) who are familiar beyond the realm of historical specialists, this book attempts to bring to the fore a host of intriguing and insightful figures. On our specific theme – mirroring representation, its institutions and values – a profound and multifaceted debate was generated through the manifold contributions of authors from a wide array of professional, intellectual, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Victorian period is therefore an excellent proving ground for the proposition that going beyond the philosophical canon to reconstruct broader currents of political thought can yield theoretical benefits.

In addition, the second half of the nineteenth century constitutes a kind of ideal point from which to take up questions about representation that are still with us today. Victorian thinkers tended to combine support for many of the values which still loom large in contemporary politics and philosophy – deliberation, inclusivity, pluralism, responsiveness to public opinion – with a different set of beliefs about what sort of representative structures and forms of electoral regulation instantiated these values. Likewise, their sense of how these values and institutions related in turn to such apparently familiar master-categories as liberalism, democracy, and modernity is often alien to our own. Sharing much with and yet departing interestingly from twenty-first-century politics and philosophy, nineteenth-century Britain is the right kind of mirror to hold up to contemporary political theory. In particular, by recovering a world in which descriptive representation was a widely held ideal but the meaning and desirability of democracy were hotly contested, we are able to gain a critical vantage point on a number of issues prominent today. The tensions and trade-offs between rival views of representation are more easily seen in the light of the more pluralistic normative-political vocabulary of Victorian controversy than in the flatter, more univocal idiom of contemporary political theory and public debate, over which democracy looms as

[10] E.g. J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (Cambridge, 1986), 48; H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809–1898* (Oxford, 1997), esp. part 2, chs. 2–3; Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, 2001), ch. 2.

a kind of amorphous and all-encompassing presence.[11] At the least, it is in keeping with the striking revival of interest in representation – from its first principles to matters of institutional design[12] – in recent political theory to examine with care a period at once formative for and under-explored by contemporary political theory.

Let me close with a few clarificatory points.

First, a word is due about the scope and limits of this study. This is not a history of British democratization, nor does it attempt causal explanations of political events more generally. Without the research done in such fields as the comparative history of electoral institutions, and without the comparative-politics and formal-theoretical literatures on electoral institutions, this book would not have been possible. But it is not a book in that vein. Nor does this volume attempt a chronological narrative, as is the case with many histories of political thought. Although taken as a whole the book does move forward chronologically, and although it takes account of changes that occurred over the decades covered, its basic organization is thematic rather than temporal. It offers a historically grounded analysis and interpretation of traditions of thought about representation – of normative-institutional clusters, if you will. It aims to map the territory of thought about democracy, diversity, inclusivity, deliberation, parliamentarianism, elections, and related themes in the mid-to-late Victorian era. And it seeks to explain how these outlooks and discourses worked: how they both influenced and reacted to the political and intellectual conditions of the time; how their constituent assumptions, arguments, rhetorical strategies, social imaginaries, and institutional proposals fit together or pulled apart.

Another proviso about the book's scope derives from the fact that, given a suitably rich terrain, in the history of political thought there is always more than one story to tell. Consequently, this book should not be taken as a comprehensive account of theories of representation or democracy in nineteenth-century Britain. These are widely ramifying subjects, aspects of which have been examined well by other scholars. *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation* is meant as a complement to, not a replacement for, other studies of the multifarious debates about representative government and parliamentary reform of the era, such as those which have homed in on the

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[11] E.g. Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002), 1–10.
[12] E.g. Sofia Nässtrom, "Review Article: Where Is the Representative Turn Going?" *EJPT*, 10 (2011): 501–10.

question of the deserving or undeserving character of the working class, the notions of sinister versus legitimate interest, clashes over the existence or nonexistence of a natural right to the suffrage, or ideas about the "capacity" required to qualify for political participation.[13] While I certainly hope that this book will illuminate these issues, they are considered here only as they bear on themes related to mirroring representation.

The third point is terminological. Throughout this volume I use the term "descriptive representation" in a capacious sense, as largely although not entirely synonymous with "mirroring."[14] Put most concisely, I understand a descriptive theory to be one which posits that the representative system is to be judged by the degree to which it reflects salient social cleavages, however these are defined. In other words, it is a view that states that *authorization* alone is not sufficient to establish a satisfactory system of representation because such a system requires a correspondence between the composition of representative institutions (paradigmatically, the assembly) and an understanding of the relevant kinds of diversity in society at large. This manner of conceptualizing descriptive representation departs from some recent usages in political theory, which employ the term only in a narrower way to designate the shared demographic identity between a specific congressman or MP and a body of citizens (hence an American senator of Asian background is said to have a special kind of "standing-for" relationship to Asian-American citizens). Instead, I follow those writers who understand descriptive representation in a way that is broader in two senses: first, by seeing it as a category that can apply to both specific officials (with respect to their belonging to or standing for particular demographic blocs) and to institutions judged holistically (based on the attributes of its membership overall, an assembly as a body can be or fail to be descriptively-representative of the society for which it legislates); second, by leaving open precisely which aspects of social life

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[13] The leading study of the concept of capacity in this period is Alan Kahan's *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2003). I accept the bulk of Kahan's account of capacity and have benefited much from it. Where I diverge from Kahan is in this: Kahan treats mirroring representation as merely an offshoot or subset of capacitarian arguments, whereas I see mirroring representation as an integral outlook on representation in its own right, one which interacted with and incorporated notions of capacity in varying degrees across different authors and schemes. Ideas of capacity feature in this book, therefore, insofar as they were one important factor that could enter into the judgments about the nature of society which authors then wished to translate into or reflect in the Commons.

[14] E.g. Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, 1967), ch. 4. I believe it is best to understand these terms in such a way that they can diverge, for reasons examined in Chapter 4: briefly, that PR had a claim to *mirror* opinion accurately, but had in fact departed from a descriptive system as that had been traditionally understood.

are to be accounted for in judgments about descriptive representativeness, such that they might include class, "interests" of both a socioeconomic and other sort, occupation, religion, gender, race, opinions, perspectives, regional and linguistic communities, and more.[15] Indeed, it is a lesson imparted by the study of nineteenth-century Britain that there are as many possible notions of descriptive representation as there are conceptions of the nature of society.

A final point concerns the book's structure, the building blocks of which, as mentioned earlier, are not individual authors or successive chronological periods, but contending *schools of thought* about mirroring representation. The book is arranged around the reconstruction of the three above-named paradigms for the realization of descriptively-representative, deliberative government. Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to the variety-of-suffrages theory: Chapter 1 covers the different institutional schemes that fell within this family of approaches, while Chapter 2 explores the set of values that undergirded these schemes. Because the variety-of-suffrages was the traditional British "mirror theory of representation," Chapter 1 also includes a brief survey of the historical background of the "unreformed Parliament" out of which this outlook grew. Chapter 3 moves on to depict the reaction of democrats to this school of electoral variegation. Chapters 4 and 5 take up the movement for PR. The first of these chapters analyzes the key technical and conceptual elements of Victorian PR, with a special focus on identifying the continuities and discontinuities with traditional descriptivism; the second examines the broader set of goods which the PR campaign sought to realize, as well as defenses of the plurality-rule system that developed in reaction against it.

From this outline, it might look as if there is an inequality between the treatments of the different schools. Democracy may seem to be given short shrift relative to the other outlooks, receiving only one chapter instead of two (and a shorter one at that). This impression is partly accurate. The familiarity of uniform suffrage under plurality-rule elections to Anglophone readers makes it unnecessary to scrutinize its institutional aspects in the level of detail that I have reserved for the variety-of-suffrages and PR. Moreover, my analysis of Victorian democratic theory has more modest aims than my treatments of the other two schools, which try to convey something like complete approaches to parliamentary reform

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[15] On the variety of factors that have been the objects of descriptive concern, see e.g. Mark Brown, "Citizen Panels and the Concept of Representation," *JPP*, 14 (2006): 203–25; Gerhard Loewenberg, *On Legislatures* (New York, 2011), 27–9.

in their integrity. What is relevant to this book about the democratic thought of the period is, rather, the more limited problem of how it sought to respond to a longstanding and vibrant tradition of antidemocratic mirroring. In another respect, however, the shortfall in attention paid to democracy is more apparent than real. The question of democracy is as pervasive in this monograph as it was in the intellectual and political life of the Victorian period. It is omnipresent in Chapters 1 and 2 for the simple reason that the variety of suffrages was defined as an antidemocratic program, as a haven from democracy's ills; hence, understanding the kind of political system which its advocates believed democracy to be is of fundamental importance for grasping these authors and their programs. And it is equally salient in Chapters 4 and 5 insofar as the question of the relationship between PR and democracy was a vexed one which stimulated the expression of an array of contending views and which imparted to the debate about Hare's and Mill's scheme much of its dynamism and energy. The issue of democracy therefore runs throughout this book, and it is for this reason that I hope that it can serve to deepen our genealogy of democratic theory.