Democracy or Epistocracy: Why Participation Matters

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Abstract

With the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's electoral success, the year 2016 makes scholars like Jason Brennan question whether democracy and the equal right to vote are of intrinsic value. In *Against Democracy*, Brennan contends that the "one person one vote" system of participatory democracy is too often corrupted by ignorance and misinformation, and hence should give way to a rule of knowledge, namely epistocracy. This essay attempts to rescue democracy by drawing from Mary Park Follett's model of a robust participatory democracy that emphasizes creative citizenship and integration. Follett's participatory democracy not only avoids illegitimate domination but also provides a proper civic education that resolves Brennan's concern.

Introduction

In 2016, democracy had a bad year.[1] With the Brexit referendum and Trump's success, scholars like Jason Brennan question whether democracy and the equal right to vote have any intrinsic value at all.[2] Are citizens qualified to make political decisions through democratic elections? More fundamentally, is the old-fashioned "one person one vote" system of participatory democracy justified? In *Against Democracy*, Brennan argues that voters' ignorance and misinformation lead to suboptimal and sometimes quite bad political outcomes in democracies, hence democracy should give way to a rule of knowledge, namely epistocracy, which empirically can generate better outcomes.[3]

This essay attempts to rescue democracy by drawing from Mary Park Follett's model of a robust participatory democracy that emphasizes creative citizenship and integration. I contend that Follett's participatory democracy might

1. Jason Brennan. *Against Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), vii.
2. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, ix.
3. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, ix.

provide a proper civic education to the general public that could resolve the ignorance issues Brennan raises, and therefore has the potential to produce equally good if not better policy outcomes compared with epistocracy. I further claim that Brennan is mistaken that political institutions are of instrumental value only. Analyzing Follett's conceptions of "power-with," I find the political decision-making process to be more justified in participatory democracy than in epistocracy because participatory democracy avoids illegitimate domination over citizens. As participatory democracy surpasses epistocracy both in terms of justified processes and substantive policy outcomes, this paper concludes that participatory democracy promises a superior form of government compared with epistocracy.

Roadmap

The rest of the paper will progress as follows. First, I will briefly sketch out Brennan's and Follett's central arguments, namely Brennan's moral competence principle and Follett's creative citizenship through neighbourhood politics. Second, I will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of epistocracy and participatory democracy in terms of their capability to produce policies that better promote the general welfare. Specifically, I will focus on how epistocracy and participatory democracy shape citizens' incentive structures and provide citizens with different resources to become more politically competent. Third, I will turn to discuss why Brennan's instrumental understanding of government is incomplete and forward the argument that politics could empower people, therefore, process matters. Lastly, I will end with a closer examination of the practical difficulties Follett's robust participatory democracy faces, in particular, how to balance individuality and social unity in reality.

Brennan's Moral Competence Principle

Imagine you are a judge who is overseeing a jury in court. You observe that instead of a careful examination of evidence and deliberative discussion, this jury reaches a verdict ignorantly and irrationally. As a judge, do you have a moral obligation to intervene and override this verdict? Most of us would answer affirmatively. The verdict seems to be illegitimate and should not be enforced because this jury has failed its obligation as a vehicle by which justice is to be delivered.[4] Given the verdict can greatly affect the defendant's and others' life prospects, it seems unjust to enforce a verdict reached by an incompetent jury.

Brennan generalizes the moral significance of competence and applies it to governance.[5] The decisions of the state are often greatly impactful and can be imposed involuntarily on citizens through violence and threats of violence. In other words, policy decisions are essentially the same as verdicts. It follows that

4. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 153.
5. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 156.

policy makers should also be competent, i.e., informed and rational. According to Brennan, citizens have at least as strong grounds as defendants to expect competence from government decision makers as a matter of right.[6]

Are policy-makers in a democracy competent or not? In Brennan's opinion, representatives are not the only policy-makers. Since ordinary people elect their representatives, their votes are also considered to be significant political decisions and Brennan's concern is exactly with people's right to vote. Empirical evidence appears to suggest that the majority of the population are not competent enough to make important political decisions such as choosing their own representatives. To begin with, most citizens cannot identify any congressional candidates in their district during election years.[7] Citizens also generally do not known which party controls Congress.[8] For as long as political scientists have been measuring, average voters have been misinformed or ignorant about basic political information which often causes them to support suboptimal policies and candidates.[9]

In Brennan's view, the problem of voter incompetence is inherent to democracy. While on the surface, democracy seems to empower each individual citizen with an equal share of political power, this share is so small that individuals do not feel that their participation actually makes a difference. Therefore, democracy provides little incentive for citizens to use their political power with discretion, not to mention to actively inform themselves.[10] Brennan suggests that participatory democracy is dominated by two kinds of citizens: the Hobbits and the Hooligans. The Hobbits are the ones who are politically apathetic and have very low levels of political knowledge, whereas the Hooligans are people who are politically motivated but cherry-pick facts to strengthen their preexisting biases.[11] Although Brennan does not deny that there could also exist fair-minded, knowledgeable citizens, he argues that their voices will be overwhelmed by the ignorant and irrational masses.

Brennan's argument against democracy can be summarized like this: people are entitled to competent governance, but participatory democracy is overwhelmed with incompetent average voters; in order to counter-balance the political influence of the ignorant mass, we must reward the knowledgeable with extra political influences, i.e., a rule of epistocracy. Brennan's moral competence theory goes beyond the claim that competence is a necessary condition for just governance, but it is also a sufficient condition. Government is viewed as only

6. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 156.
7. Russell Hardin, *How Do You Know? The Economics of Ordinary Knowledge.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 60.
8. Ilya Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance: Why Smaller Government is Smarter* (Stanford: Stanford Law Books, 2013), 17-21.
9. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, ix.
10. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 51-52.
11. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 5.

a vehicle to deliver policies that best promote the general welfare. In Brennan's own words, whichever hammer that works the best is the one we should aspire to.[12]

Follett's Creative Citizenship and Integration

While Brennan searches for the best hammer, Follett thinks that democracy is more than a coordinating agency, but a great moral leader as well.[13] What is democracy in Follett's theory? According to Follett, democracy should not be simply the rule of the majority, instead, it should be the rule of "an interacting, interpermeating whole."[14] Creative citizenship and integrative thinking are the two central ideas in Follett's democracy. As she puts it, "Democracy is an infinitely including spirit . . . [It is] neither extending nor including merely, but creating wholes"[15] Follett's vision of democracy is a process that creates a social unity through citizens' active participation.

First and foremost, participatory democracy is about unity and wholeness. Follett does not envision democracy as a mechanical aggregation, i.e., a matter of counting votes.[16] She advocates for integrative thinking which aims not to compromise or concede when there is a difference, but to search for win-win solutions. Opposite to divergent thinking, which is a mindset based on scarcity and zero-sum relationships, integrative thinking fosters abundance through a mindset of possibility. It is a process by which many options are created to foster a new way of being in the world.[17] Consider an example of two people in a library room. One person wants the window open to get some fresh air and the other wants it closed to avoid the draft.[18] If one adopts divergent thinking, one of the two would have to concede and lose. However, Follett's integrative thinking suggests that instead of sacrificing someone's interest, they can open a window in the next room, bringing in fresh air without the draft.[19] To generalize Follett's integrative principle and apply it to politics, she calls upon us to overcome our fears and embrace our enemies—that is, all those who think and are different from us. The power of integrative thinking at the individual and collective levels advances a process whereby we engage and honor our differences

12. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 14.
13. Mary Parker Follett, *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government* (Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2016), 333.
14. Follett, *The New State*, 156.
15. Follett, *The New State*, 157.
16. Jane Mansbridge, "Mary Parker Follett: Feminist and Negotiator (Foreword)," in *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*, ed. Mary Follett (Penn: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xxiii.
17. Mary Follett, *Freedom and Coordination: Lectures in Business Organization*, ed. Lyndall Urwick (London: Management Publications Trust, Ltd., 1949), 34-46.
18. Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 41.
19. Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *Getting to Yes*, 41.

not as conflicts but as opportunities for learning.[20] In short, Follett aspires to a collective will that respects and absorbs our differences and unites us as a whole.

Follett's integrative thinking might sound too good to be true, which leads to the second question: how can we overcome our differences and learn to think and act as a whole? Follett answers that we must "walk the talk"—that is, "living" a democratic life of ideas and experiences rather than a passive life of abstraction and entitlement.[21] Follett uses a religious parallel to explain this concept of creative citizenship: we are one with God not by prayer and communication alone, but by doing the Goddess every moment, so we are one with the state by actualizing the latent state at every instant of our lives.[22] Our relationship with the state should not be one of rights and duties, i.e., paying taxes and expecting good governance in return, as Brennan might envision. Citizenship should be an activity constantly exercised and democracy does not exist unless each person is taking their share in building the state-to-be.[23] State should not be a machine which functions on its own with a simple press of a button. On the contrary, state needs to be a common project that every citizen is constantly working on.

Where should we exercise citizenship? Follett argues that citizenship cannot be exercised or learned in abstract by taking a civic lesson. Citizenship must be exercised in neighborhoods where we can find a definite objective for individual responsibility.[24] According to Follett, neighborhood community could be the macro setting where the power is grown by individuals in relationships with each other and where democracy may be realized.[25] By participating in neighborhood organizations, individuals could relate to society better, seeing their civic duty as a specific, concrete thing taking definite shape for him.[26] Unlike Brennan's citizens who might rely on on the omnipotent government to bring justice to them, Follett's citizens would have a keen sense of personal responsibility, taking upon themselves the blame for their evils and the charge for their progress.[27] In short, Follett's participatory state could be achieved through the creative power of man as brought into visibility and actuality through his group life.[28] Neighborhood community should be seen as an ecological system, much like a garden, in which the various elements and citizens interact with each other, tend to each other, in relational processes to create something beautiful together.[29]

20. Gary S. Nelson, "Mary Parker Follett—Creativity and Democracy," *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership, & Governance* 41, no. 2 (2017): 178-185.
21. Nelson, "Mary Parker Follett," 182.
22. Follett, *The New State*, 335.
23. Follett, *The New State*, 335.
24. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
25. Nelson, "Mary Parker Follett," 183.
26. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
27. Follett, *The New State*, 341.
28. Follett, *The New State*, 342.
29. Nelson, "Mary Parker Follett," 183.

Follett's creative and integrative democracy is one where citizens embrace each other's differences and bring their unique contributions to the state through active participation in neighborhood communities. The process of democratic participation is considered as important, if not more important than the policy result. Follett's democracy emphasizes on both individuality and social unity. It aspires to a dynamic and inclusive policy that is created by unique individuals who strive for a common project.

Overcoming Ignorance: Neighborhood Education

As I have explained Brennan's and Follett's positions, I now turn to examine Brennan's most important challenge, namely that most citizens are too incompetent to govern. The obvious advantage of Brennan's position is that his ideal government would be comprised of the most knowledgeable elites who have the necessary expertise to govern. However, do elites have an absolute advantage over commoners in governance? I argue that Follett's creative state, if implemented, educates citizens through participation in the long run whereas Brennan's elite regime runs the risk of bias and misinformation.

What Is Political Knowledge?

Brennan maintains that political engagement in democracies is more likely to corrupt and stultify than to ennoble and educate people, turning a Hobbit into a Hooligan at best.[30] He cites Sarah Birch's research which reviews nearly every published paper on compulsory voting, a form of mandatory universal political participation, and concludes that it does not improve voters' knowledge.[31] Brennan argues that this is because when citizens start voting, it does not by itself cause them to take a greater interest in politics or learn more.[32] When participation is not compulsory, citizens who participate more actively demonstrate a higher level of political knowledge not because participation educates, but because of a selection effect—that is, more informed citizens tend to participate more. Brennan also denies that democratic deliberation can be educational. He cites political psychologist Tali Mendelberg who discovers an endless list of biases voters suffer from and concludes that when groups engage in discussion, they do not generate empathy or approach the discussion with a mind open to change.[33]

I do not contend that the most common forms of democratic participation nowa-

30. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 55.

31. Sarah Birch, *Full Participation: A Comparative Study of Compulsory Voting* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 49-51; Birch, *Full Participation*, 57-67; Birch, *Full Participation*, 140.

32. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 58.

33. Tali Mendelberg, "The Deliberate Citizen: Theory and Evidence," in *Research in Micropolitics: Political Decision Making, Deliberation and Participation*, ed. Michael X. Delli Carpini, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Shapiro (Greenwich: JAI Press, 2002), 180.

days are not educational as Brennan has illustrated empirically. Yet the specific kind of participation Follett forwards differs from compulsory voting or simple group discussion. The most knowledgeable political scientists are not necessarily the best policy-makers because they might not have the necessary local knowledge or an integrative mindset.

Unlike Brennan, who wants citizens to acquire more knowledge about politics, Follett emphasizes knowledge about participation. Follett describes neighborhood education as a process where citizens could be helped to discover their greatest ability, see the stimulus to apply, the path of approach, and that the constituents of their neighborhood should not merely serve but should serve in exactly that way which will best fit themselves into the community needs.[34] A polity needs not every citizen to be a political expert. It could function well with some of its citizens contributing their expertise in politics while others may contribute through other means. Follett draws an analogy to the system of war registration, where men and women record what they are best able to do, which might, through the medium of the neighbourhood group, be applied to the whole country.[35] A nurse may be defined as a Hobbit by Brennan for not knowing how many Senators there are. However, she might possess valuable information regarding the deficiency of the local healthcare system that a political scientist is not familiar with. In Brennan's epistocracy, this nurse would undoubtedly be disqualified for political participation due to her ignorance in politics—and yet in Follett's democracy, she would be given an opportunity to learn how to pass on the information she possesses to those who might be better equipped to provide policy solutions. Brennan might be right that the current voting system is flawed because it does not extract the appropriate information from each person. With that being said, this flaw does not provide sufficient grounds for exclusion. Instead, we should aspire to Follett's model which could accommodate people's different endowments and enable citizens to contribute in their own unique ways.

Benevolent Elites?

Brennan is concerned with psychological biases but somehow does not seem to worry about the knowledgeable who might be subjected to biases as well. As he acknowledges, most citizens who are politically knowledgeable nonetheless process political knowledge in deeply biased, partisan, motivated ways rather than in dispassionate, rational ways.[36] This is particularly dangerous given that empirically political literacy is positively correlated with a college education, higher income, being a Republican, and negatively correlated with being Black or a female.[37] In the most ideal version of epistocracy, Brennan would

34. Follett, *The New State*, 339-340.
35. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
36. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 37.
37. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 33.

suffer from the loss of valuable local knowledge. However, a more realistic challenge is that Brennan's epistocracy is likely to give additional advantages to some of the already privileged social groups who are likely to abuse these advantages given their psychological biases. Since political knowledge is not evenly distributed among all demographic groups, epistocracy runs the risk of producing unfair policies that serve in the interests of the advantaged rather than the disadvantaged.[38]

Brennan tries to avoid this challenge by arguing that even in democracies, certain groups of people tend to do better than others and it is false to presuppose that voters will each vote for their self-interest only.[39] However, in the face of Follett's integrative democracy, Brennan's defenses seem feeble. In addition to local knowledge that elites may not possess, which is already discussed above, Brennan also needs to explain why citizens may not vote according to their self-interest in an epistocracy. In fact, Follett's citizens have a better chance to have equal considerations for other citizens' interest supposing that they possess an integrative mindset. Neighborhood organizations not only have the potential to enable us to discover our unique ability to contribute, but also could give us a definite objective for individual responsibility.[40] Citizens would not be able to understand their duty or perform their duty unless it is a duty to something.[41] The intimacy in neighborhoods might eliminate the vagueness of civic duty and therefore citizens may genuinely believe that they are the state, hence offers the possibility of taking on the responsibility to care for fellow citizens.

To clarify, I do not argue that Follett's citizens are immune to psychological biases. Instead, my claim is that Follett's participatory democracy has the potential to dilute biases by including more members of society and educating them to think in wholeness. Although Brennan's political elites may be more knowledgeable, they have little incentive to correct their own biases and care for the disadvantaged groups which are excluded from participation.

Why Are People Ignorant?

Despite the fact that Brennan's elites may lack local knowledge and be biased, Brennan is not mistaken that political literacy is an important part of good political participation. Does Follett's participatory democracy offer a solution for the issue of ignorance? I argue that it does, because it aspires to change the incentive structure that Brennan identifies as problematic.

Brennan states that most voters are not stupid: they just do not care.[42] Becoming politically literate requires at least some effort and citizens just find these

38. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 227.
39. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 227.
40. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
41. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
42. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 30.

efforts unworthy of their energy and time. According to Brennan, the root of the problem is that citizens do not think that their participation matters. A vote makes a difference only if there is a tie; otherwise, it usually does not matter for whom someone votes or whether they vote at all. Yet the probability a person will break a tie is vanishingly small, even smaller than winning Powerball a few times in a row.[43]

Again, Brennan's facts are not false. However, his view is limited in the sense that he considers voting to be the only channel of participation. Follett's neighborhood political training directly deals with the incentive issue. When democracy is degraded to a matter of counting votes, citizens are bound to think of themselves as nothing more than a grain of sand in the desert.[44] Almost certainly, if a person thinks their share in the collective responsibility as a 1/500,000 part of the whole responsibility, that is too small a part to interest them to perform such an infinitesimal duty.[45] The neighborhood organization is designed to change this thinking. As Follett puts it, a person is not a grain of sand in the desert, but rather a key of a piano in a neighborhood.[46] The value of the key is not in its being 1/56 of all the notes but in its infinite relations to all other notes. If that note is lacking, every other note loses its value.[47] Participation through neighborhood, if implemented, could instill a sense of unique responsibility in citizens which may stay with them as they participate in bigger political communities. When participation is not just about casting a vote that probably will not break the tie, but about playing a unique role in one's own community, citizens could be better incentivized to become politically literate.

In sum, Brennan's epistocracy promises less competent governance than Follett's participatory democracy for three reasons. First, Brennan neglects that non-experts may possess valuable local knowledge that cannot be collected if they are excluded from political participation whereas Follett aspires to teach citizens how to participate. Second, Brennan's epistocracy is likely to result in a rule of biased and privileged elites, who are unlikely to possess the same integrative mindset as Follett's citizens, which might lead to unfavorable policies for the already disadvantaged minority groups. Third, participating in Follett's neighborhood communities might make people aware of their individual importance to the collective. This change in incentive shows promise to solve the political illiteracy problem Brennan identifies in the long-run, whereas by excluding people from participation, Brennan essentially deprives them of both their incentive and resource to become more politically literate.

43. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 31.
44. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
45. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
46. Follett, *The New State*, 340.
47. Follett, *The New State*, 340.

More Than a Hammer

In the previous sections, I have followed Brennan's framework, treating politics as nothing more than an instrument to produce policies that best promote the overall welfare. In this section, I turn to challenge this very assumption and argue that the form of democratic government has an intrinsic value, namely constructing and preserving a morally justified power structure, which Brennan's epistocracy does not recognize. Given that Brennan's epistocracy does not necessarily has any instrumental advantage, he needs to justify the inequality in political influences as well as elites' domination over others that epistocracy inevitably produces.

In a nutshell, Brennan's disregard for unjustified domination arises from his pessimism. He thinks that citizens' participation in politics can neither provide them with a sense of non-alienation, nor avoid domination. Before I present his objections, I will first clarify what is at stake here.

Thomas Christiano holds that political participation serves each person's fundamental interest in being at home in their social world, not alienated from it, and in being part of a social process in which their views are taken seriously.[48] Unequal political influences deprive citizens of this fundamental interest because they do not have equal resources to affect the outcomes of collective decision-making that determines laws imposed on all. In Brennan's epistocracy, citizens who are not politically literate enough will certainly feel alienated as the political decision-making process is monopolized by the elites.

In addition to the sense of alienation, inequality of political influences also raises the question of subjection. In Brennan's epistocracy, state authority will be centralized in the hands of a few political elites which means the mass is subjected to the elites. Daniel Viehoff proposes that such a political arrangement violates relational equality. He argues that it is an important feature of certain valuable relationships like citizenship that they require us to set aside—and not act on—unequal power advantages in shaping our interactions and the norms and expectations governing them.[49] To borrow an image from Rousseau: democracies have a special authority because they answer our need to replace "whatever physical inequality nature may have placed between men" with "a moral and legitimate equality," so that men, "while they may be unequal in force or in genius, all become equal by convention and by right."[50]

It is important to note that Brennan does not deny the value of non-alienation or non-subjection. His response is that democracy could not safeguard any

48. Thomas Christiano, "Debate: Estlund on Democratic Authority," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, no.2 (2009): 228-240.

49. Daniel Viehoff, "Democratic Equality and Political Authority," *Philosophy Public Affairs* 42, no. 4 (2014): 337-375.

50. Viehoff, "Democratic Equality," 352.

of these values. In response to Christiano's nonalienation argument, Brennan claims that democracies could never feel at home because our homes are niches. Most of us are at home in our homes because we may unilaterally shape our homes to reflect our preferences, something we cannot achieve in a broader political community because individual citizens are nearly powerless in them.[51] He compares participation in democracy to doing a wave at a sports game. The wave will happen with or without one's own participation, so citizens can only passively choose whether to accept and enjoy the outcome or not.[52] Brennan also claims that subjection happens in democracy as well. According to Brennan, empowering people like me to vote tends to protect me only if the people like me tend to vote in ways that protect me. My vote does not prevent others from dominating and exploiting me. What prevents me from being dominated is that other citizens either choose to restrain themselves or are in some way restrained.[53]

What underlies Brennan's pessimism is a misconception that individuals cannot make a difference in a larger community. Democracy is no better than epistocracy because it is just a tyranny of the majority versus a tyranny of the elite. My task then is to prove that Follett's conception of power-with sheds light on the significance of individuality in a large entity.

Follett defines Brennan's mistake as the fallacy of finals: a misbelief that the final moment in the process of decision-making is more important than any other moments.[54] The policy decision is not made when the president signs their name on the bill. Instead, the process begins when the first citizen gives their representative a phone call and expresses their concern with the issue. Follett asks us to recognize authority as a process in which every participant shares equal responsibility and power. She uses the term "power-with" to describe this power that is jointly developed, co-active, and non-coercive.[55] She quotes the president of a company who aims for "a kind of management with authority all down the line, as contrasted with management by edict from a central source. We are trying to teach our men what their jobs are, and then insist that they shall exercise the authority and responsibility which goes with that job instead of relying on the fellow above them."[56] When we think of this process in a political environment, we can easily see where Brennan goes wrong. He only focuses on the final vote that breaks a tie and the final signature that authorizes a law, but does not appreciate that each citizen, when participating in politics, is already exercising their share of authority and henceforth contributing to the final project. The Congressperson is not superior to an ordinary citizen just because their decision is higher above. People's positions in the decision-

51. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 93.
52. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 92.
53. Brennan, *Against Democracy*, 98.
54. Follett, *Freedom and Coordination*, 147.
55. Mansbridge, *Mary Parker Follett*, xviii.
56. Follett, *Freedom and Coordination*, 147.

making process are only reflective of their specialities and functions, instead of being indicators of superior power. Therefore, empowerment is not lost until an epistocracy effectively removes all the steps taken by ordinary citizens prior to politicians' final decision.

Non-alienation and non-subjection are likely to be protected in Follett's participatory democracy because individuals could potentially feel their impact on their neighborhood communities and exercise their own authority by participating. As local communities are much smaller in scale compared with the nation, individuals are more likely to appreciate their unique bonds with fellow community members and with the community as a whole, which would give them a feeling of being at home. In addition, Follett points out that collective decision-making process needs not to be coercive or dominating. When citizens actively partake in this process by performing their parts, they are jointly developing the power of the state instead of being subjected to an arbitrary power imposed over them. Democracy needs not to be a tyranny of majority. Instead, democracy could be a process where every individual's decision matters.

Discussion and Conclusion

This essay compares Jason Brennan's epistocracy and Mary Park Follett's participatory democracy and concludes that we should still aspire to Follett's participatory democracy because it is capable of delivering substantively good policy outcomes and constructing a more desirable power structure. While Brennan poses a valid empirical challenge that citizens are too ignorant to participate in politics, Follett's education through neighborhood communities, if implemented, could resolve this problem and lead to a more inclusive and fair government. Moreover, Follett sketches out a vision of jointly developed power which sheds light on how citizens may be free from subjection in a democracy.

Although, in my opinion, Follett's theory aspires to a more desirable form of government than Brennan's, she still leaves a few questions unanswered. Skeptical readers might wonder whether Follett's vision is only wishful thinking. To test whether participatory democracy can happen in real life, Maria Elias conducted a phenomenological research in a neighborhood of Akron, Ohio, a fairly diverse community where the neighbors themselves created various self-governing institutions in response to particular issues that strike the neighborhood such as economic development, safety, historical preservation, housing development, arts and recreation, planning and zoning, cleaning and trash pick-up, and the needs of children, the elderly, and others.[57] Throughout her interviews, Elias finds a robust sense of participation and integrative thinking in the community. One member reflects: "I realized that we have a great array of people in the neighborhood, and I realized how rich we are... you learn what other

57. Maria Vernoica Elias, "Governance from the Ground Up: Rediscovering Mary Marker Follett," *Public Administration and Management* 15, no. 1 (2010): 16-17.

people's needs are. As a group we need to do something about it. So being involved in the group has really opened my eyes to what the various issues are in the different constituencies. And it has made me very passionate about the neighborhood."[58] Another member pushes the idea of neighborhood association further: "The plan is to have a couple of streets take care of themselves, like Campinha (a neighborhood group). This is the model of what we would want to see in other parts of the neighborhoods... when you have groups like Campinha who make events for their street and the whole neighborhood... We need more streets that take ownership of their little corner of the neighborhood and work for its improvements. Miraflores (another neighborhood group) should be the umbrella for all the other little groups."[59] As Elias' research demonstrates, Follett's neighborhood governance model can thrive and expand in local communities.

With that being said, given that Follett aims to promote individuality and social unity at the same time, how exactly should we balance the two in practice, especially when the community is large? Mansbridge questions whether Follett's integrated solutions are always possible.[60] There is an undeniable benefit in keeping others' interests in mind when we make political decisions even when integration is not possible; however, Follett lacks a solution when there is no win-win solution. If we do encounter a zero-sum situation, should some of us concede voluntarily, letting others place their interests above us? If nobody wants to sacrifice, does the collective have to exert coercive power to make the final decision then? Brennan has an easy answer to these questions. He would suggest that the most competent politicians would make a decision on people's behalf. However, this option is certainly not available for Follett because of her commitment to equal consideration for all citizens.

In relation to this question of individual and collective conflict, Mansbirdge also raises concerns regarding Follett's language of "group," "harmony," "likemindedness," and "similarity" which seems to suggest the obliteration of differences.[61] It is ideal if diversity and differences are not to be homogenized in a melting pot, but used as a source of unity and a driver of innovation[62] However, there seems to exist a tension between social unity and individuality that might be magnified as the scale of polity increases. It is easier to discern the value of one's individuality in a small town of two thousand people, but how can we maintain our individuality and a belief in social unity in a nation of two million? Is preserving individuality possible in larger polities?

Follett's theory is valuable as it might restore our confidence in democracy in

58. Elias, "Governance", 21.
59. Elias, "Governance", 20.
60. Mansbridge, *Mary Parker Follett*, xxiv.
61. Mansbridge, *Mary Parker Follett*, xxv
62. Nelson, "Mary Parker Follett," 181.

this turbulent age. Her emphasis on local communities and integrative thinking provides an alternative route to an improved form of democracy in the future. Albeit there are still many questions to be answered regarding the practicality of her creative state, Follett makes a strong case that democracy should be the political arrangement to which we should aspire.

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