**CAN DEMOCRACY RECOVER?**

**THE ROOTS OF A CRISIS**

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This book is dedicated to my wife *Ruth HaCohen*

whose love and intellect are the treasure of my Life

And to my sister *Ofra Ezrahi Broshi*

who for many decades endowed me

with her wisdom and unwavering support

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Preface

“Democracy is in some sense an unfinished project, a regime always in a state of becoming.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Yaron Ezrahi was born in 1940 in Tel Aviv, on the Mediterranean, in the first modern Hebrew city, founded in 1909. His grandfather, Mordechai Krichevsky, imprisoned by the Tzar for his Zionist activities in the early 1890s, vowed to become a free citizen of his own country. In prison, he changed his name to Ezrahi, meaning in Hebrew “civilian.” Once freed, he immigrated to Palestine. It took half a century for this aspiration to be fulfilled: Mordechai would live in the independent State of Israel for one year before passing away in 1949. His grandson took upon himself his story as a testament: to become a citizen, he fathomed, is both a privilege and an obligation. Jews, a minority in the Diaspora for two millennia, once having established their own democratic state, must learn how to build a polity. Released from army service in 1960, the young Yaron Ezrahi was determined to study political science, thus contributing to the great Zionist mission of the time.

Young Ezrahi believed in democracy and was fascinated by science. At Harvard, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation under the guidance of his esteemed mentor and friend, Judith Shklar, he examined the strategies deployed by democratic governments to harness science for their own goals. Science, he observed, lends transparency, factuality, and the notion of causality to democratic epistemology. But often, he realized, these values function in politics as fictions unsupported by social facts. And yet, Yaron insists, these shared fictions—once becoming full-fledged imaginaries—are necessary for upholding a commonsense perception of the political and social reality.

Assessing the fragility inherent in democratic imaginaries, Yaron watched, with growing concern, their erosion over the last decades. This is the thematic core of the trilogy he composed in the course of four decades, of which the present book is the concluding installment.

And yet, for Yaron democracy exceeded epistemic procedures, whether real or imagined. His life's pursuit was founded on humanistic lore and on faith in the human spirit. He was inspired by the great thinkers whose works he consistently read and taught (at the Hebrew University and elsewhere) time and again: Montaigne, Hobbes, Rousseau and John Stuart Mill. Of those four, Rousseau was his favorite. He loved to quote the first sentences from his renowned *Confessions*:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself. . . I am made unlike any one I have ever met… I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different.[[2]](#footnote-2)

For Yaron, the individual is the starting point. Her emotions, drives, ideas, memories, and aspirations make her unique. Never a spin-off from the collective, the undivided person is the basic unit of political thought and of politics, he maintained. In the young, socialist Israel in which Yaron grew up, this was almost a scandalous notion. Since adolescence, he found himself less attracted to the activities of the youth movement and more interested in art, music and literature. That was not surprising, given the household in which he was raised. Yaron's father, Yariv, was a talented musician and held the position of head at the first conservatory in the *Yishuv* (the young state in the making). Yaron's mother worked as curator at the Tel Aviv Museum, where the founding of the State of Israel was announced by Ben-Gurion in May 1948. (Yaron, an eight-year-old boy at the time, was present there with his mother; a moment which he deemed constitutive of his life mission.) Himself a gifted painter—encouraged by Itzhak Danziger, Israel’s most important artist at the time, to pursue this career—he nonetheless opted for the life of a scholar, and never regretted his choice.

In the 1990s, in tandem with the Oslo process, Yaron would recognize the resurgence of liberal democratic ideals emphasizing individual happiness and self–realization. That was the major theme of his award-winning *Rubber Bullets: Power and Conscience in Modern Israel* (Ferrar, Straus and Giro, 1997). The individualism he advocated was profound, inspired by Petrarch’s and Wallace Stevens’ lyrical poems, by Dürer’s and Rembrandt’s self-portraits, Monteverdi’s and Mozart’s music, among many others. The individual he subscribed to was a robustly moral being, a free agent endowed with interiority and dignity, who dwells “in a world in which words and actions are attributable to individual agents and regarded sufficiently frequently as his or her voluntary ‘externalizations.’”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Yaron grasped such committed individualism as a buffer against collectivist politics, of which he was always suspicious. Losing oneself in the masses, the corporation, or the party, he believed, led, and can lead again, to the most vicious regimes. (Music, we found together, may foster both—refined individualism, as well as blatant fascism.) And yet, those undivided and irreproducible entities—persons in a given society—must find ways to horizontally connect to others for the benefit of public and personal good. Yaron held “associability” as a disposition basic to human beings and crucial for common law and the state— an essential capacity which should be cherished. In his personal life, Yaron was a model of such associability: he easily befriended those whom he met, beyond differences and social categories. Generous, he would enjoy hosting together old and new friends, who always felt so well treated by his spontaneous warmth and affection. In the main street, close to our home in Jerusalem, all the shopkeepers mourned his passing. The immediacy he radiated spoke to their hearts and also enabled a sharing of minds, however divergent the worldviews.

Warm and delightful as a friend and a family member, as a public intellectual Yaron was sharp and bold. In Israel, he garnered respect from both poles of the political spectrum, because he could always point to a wider perspective that shed light on the issue at stake. Thus, he elevated the discussion and conferred to it a new orientation and hope. His convictions were contagious and could melt resistance. Abroad he was sought for his clarity, decisiveness and unwavering support for a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Joining, in 2007, three hundred activists in south Hebron Hills, marching from At-Twani to Tuba, “Israeli soldiers and policemen stopped us on the path, with a large and threatening barrier,” Yaron told his close friend, peace activist Professor David Shulman. Shulman recalls: “Yaron stood in front of them and said, with confidence and pride,

‘My name is Yaron Ezrahi. I am a professor of political science at the Hebrew University, and I am going to Tuba today—not pending on your permission; it is unnecessary, but for the sake of justice and for the sake of peace.’ And they, embarrassed before his power and dignity, fell silent. Then he noticed the critical fact that they did not have a signed military order sanctioning the closure of the area and informed all of us and them as well. Then we joyfully watched over the checkpoint and moved on despite the soldiers' anger and disgust.”

A moment of comic relief, reminiscent, in this case, of a turning point in Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro* (finale of Act II), was typical of Yaron.

Yaron recognized the early stages of democratic institutions and procedures erosion decades prior to the judicial overhaul instigated by Netanyahu's sixth government in January 2023. He is particularly renowned for his pioneering campaign against cross-ownership in Israeli media, a malaise which he diagnosed already in the late 1990s. He was sharply aware of the corruption it entails and its paralyzing effect on free journalism. This was one of several struggles he led during his tenure as a Senior Fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute. His former students and colleagues have since taken up the mantle.

Almost five years have elapsed since Yaron passed away, and the world has changed considerably. His apprehension vis-à-vis the circulation of conspiracy theories was fully realized during the Covid-19 pandemic, corroborating the decline of the status of science among the general public. His concern for Israel's fragile democratic structure was played out in the series of premature elections and the campaign to destroy Israel's democratic institutions under the guise of a "judicial reform."

Having stood every Friday during 2010, in hot and cold weather, in Sheikh Jarah in East Jerusalem, in solidarity with the Palestinian residents who were in danger of being expelled from their homes, Yaron would have been deeply saddened by the rise of the ultranationalists in government and the resultant surge in displacement of Palestinians from their lands in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

At the same time, he would have reveled at the tremendous awakening of a huge democratic public from a long slumber, opposing the current government that sought to transform Israel from a democracy (however flawed) into an oppressive autocracy during the bulk of 2023. In fact, he would have recognized, I believe, that the powerful protest movement, along its divergent subgroups was marshalled by a strong moral drive. "Democracy", he writes in the last pages of the present book,

can be saved by replacing a naturalistic with a moral-political epistemology that would reflect the recognition that in our time we need to direct our faith onto a new imaginary. . . .An imaginary of a politics of freedom based on a moral-political epistemology that will yield the very ontology which would confer back upon this imaginary the status of a given.

The deep conviction that a society aspiring to justice, equality and solidarity must rely on a robust democratic foundation inspired hundreds of thousands of Israelis to actively fight for it with determination, creativity and persistence through most of 2023.

All this came to a halt on the horrendous October 7, 2023, massacre. I write the final sentences of this introduction a little over a month later, as the war in Gaza is still raging, together with Yaron’s daughter, Talya Ezrahi. Yaron had a premonition of a scenario of carnage of Jews by Palestinians, only he saw it transpiring in the West Bank, rather than along the Gaza Strip. Yaron, we submit, would have supported Israel’s right, or better, obligation, to defend itself along its internationally recognized borders. At the same time he would have sympathized with the plight of the Gazan population mourning the loss of so many innocent lives and wondering whether such large-scale destruction was necessary for securing Israel’s safe border.

Fundamentally, we are certain that like the many peace activists who lost family members in the massacre along the border, Yaron would have been enraged at Netanyahu's government for selling out the country to the settler-right and other powerful interest groups and the resulting betrayal of its law-abiding citizens living within Israel's sovereign borders. He would have, no doubt, publicly castigated Binyamin Netanyahu for his long-term policies which ultimately resulted in a breach of the most fundamental clause in the contract between the state and its citizens, between a democratically elected leader and his people: the responsibility to secure their right to life. We dare to venture that Yaron would have passionately pointed out that without a political horizon the current war will become another chapter, albeit particularly terrible one, in an endless cycle of violence.

At the time of writing we are still in the fog of war and living a collective trauma. It is hard to imagine a scenario given the current players in the region of a lasting resolution to this tragic incessant conflict. But Yaron was never one to succumb to despair. He was a self-proclaimed "unrepentant optimist". This was not merely a predisposition, a character trait. Yaron saw pessimism as a luxury whereas optimism was a mandatory requisite for every liberal, for every democrat who seeks progress. On this note we dare to envision that out of the ashes of the current devastation a belief in the human spirit will prevail and offer a horizon for a just solution to the longstanding conflict for the benefit of all the people living between the river and the sea.

\*

Yaron completed the book while on his deathbed. He regarded it as the seal of his intellectual legacy, which we have honored. On behalf of Yaron's children — Talya, Ariel, and Tehila Ezrahi —and myself, I express gratitude to all those who have assisted us in bringing the book to light. Dr. Talia Trainin polished the English in her usually exquisite way. Professor Sheila Jasanoff, a longtime companion of Yaron's, championed this project and exerted considerable effort to facilitate its publication. The Israel Democracy Institute supported this publication professionally and promoted its publication with Cambridge University Press. Thanks are due, in this respect, to Professor Yuval Shani, former Vice President of the Institute. The Institute appointed Dr. Dana Blander, Yaron’s student and friend, to edit the book, and I know how much effort she invested in getting it right. In her insightful postscript, she brought her own world as clinical psychologist and political theorist, to bear upon Yaron’s unique analysis of the current predicament of democracies. Dr. Susan Doron sensibly translated her essay. [thanks to the people in the press will be added later]

Ruth HaCohen, Jerusalem,

November 2023

**Words from the Author**

Though independent of my former opus on political theory, following *The Descent of Icarus* (Harvard 1990) and *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions* (Cambridge 2012), the present volume concludes the trilogy. In the first book I concentrated on the role played by the scientific revolution in the formation of modern democracy, on the evolution of instrumental politics in the West, as well as on the historical circumstances that engendered early signs foreshadowing the decline of the modern Enlightenment vision and that of democratic institutions. *Imagined Democracies* traced the crucial impact of the historically shifty collective political imagination upon the rise and fall of political regimes, bringing into focus its role in the genealogy of the modern partnership between science and democracy, roughly up to its break since the mid-twenties.

*Can Democracy Recover? The Roots of a Crisis*, closes the trilogy by analyzing the political consequences entailed in the erosion of the dichotomy between Nature and Culture as the foundational imaginary of modernity and traces its deleterious effects on derivative popular notions of political reality, causality and objectivity. Upon thoroughly examining the ensuing collapse of the political epistemology in modern democracy, the book concludes with a speculative discourse on the uncharted future of democracy.

Introduction [[4]](#footnote-4)

So, what are the grounds for the contention on the decay of contemporary democracies? Most observers look for the answer at what I deem to be the mere symptoms and external manifestations of decline—economic crises, popular unrest, massive inequalities, dwindling authority of parliaments and widespread signs of ungovernability. Analysts concentrate also on factors that exacerbated, rather than triggered the crisis, such as innovations in communications technology— mostly the digital revolution, and visual versus printed modes of electronic communications—as well as on the political impact of social networks. I would like to suggest that the liberal-democratic regime—which combined the socialization of the individual with the glorification of civic solidarity, that welded the status and integrity of the individual with the encouragement of citizens' regard for collective goods— has begun to decay, among other things, due to the impact of a ruthless capitalism. The latter engendered growing income gaps between social classes and the spread of economic insecurity, an asocial and politically disempowered individualism, as well as poverty. No less destructive for civic solidarity and participatory liberal democracy has been the proliferation of identity politics, which fragmented the democratic civic community into multiple islands of ethnic, religious and cultural splinter groups. These developments have led tothe rise ofan *undemocratic liberalism* cut off from civic individualism, from socially concerned and politically aware individuals and plagued by the rise of an illiberal public opinion. Disconnected from democracy, the development of undemocratic liberalism led the way to the rise of an*illiberal democracy*,whereby individuals remain basically unprotected by inalienable rights, firm laws, liberal political parties and associations. Moreover, under an illiberal democracy, individuals and minorities are easily crashed and sacrificed to the "people," considered as a mass.[[5]](#footnote-5) Such a mass, transformed by the deterioration of the civic public into an amorphous volatile potentially aggressive populistic entity, gives rise to authoritarian leadership.

Underlying these regressive changes, the most devastating development has been *the crisis of* *democratic political epistemology*, to which large part of this book is devoted.I will, of course**,** discussalso the above contributing factors to the decline of contemporarydemocracy. I chose to concentrate on the breakdown of the formerly shared Enlightenment democratic epistemology because, more than any other factor, it has been undermining liberalism and democracy both separately and jointly. The epistemological disarray that induced a profound insecurity regarding the common lay perception and understanding of the workings of the political system, as well as of shifts in political power and authority, led the mass public to seek for alternative accounts of political decisions and events in conspiracies and prejudices.

But, perhaps, one of the most lasting results has been the tendency of the public to abandon altogether efforts of political understanding and accounts respecting the organization and navigation of common life and turn to materialist economic explanations that, deceivingly, appeared more objective, relevant and accessible. At the level of public policy, the economic rationales of key political "things" as governmental actions and voting behavior, boosted by the claim of economics to be a science, reinforced by statistics and mathematicalmodels, actually replaced politics, or rather, drove it underground.

The disappearance of a shared political epistemology that enables citizens to hold a common imaginary of political reality, trace political causality, distinguish between political "facts" from political fictions and demand government visibility and accountability, has left democratic citizens insecure of their ability to participate and be effective in politics. This partial replacement of the political by the economic and the increasing impact of the vocabulary of economics in public affairs were undoubtedly conducive to the expansion and the tacit legitimation of a neo-liberal capitalism.

As we will recognize shortly, it is very difficult to discern, and account for, the epistemological crisis of modern democracy, given its roots in the most fundamental layer of the human imaginary of the world: cosmology and its affiliated ontology. Metaphysicians, anthropologists, and historians attribute the rise of modernity to seismic changes in this deep structure of the modern Western worldview—the shift from the monistic religious cosmology[[6]](#footnote-6) of the Middle Ages—based on the hierarchical great "Chain of Being" which set God at the apex—to the secular, anti-hierarchical dualistic cosmology of the modern West, that came about roughly since the seventeenth century. This shift from monism to dualism consisted of a foundational dichotomy between Nature and Culture, world and humanity, which engendered the very space for human agency— separated from God and Nature—that would set up the basis of politics, of democracy, as a voluntary human enterprise.

Due to the cumulative impact of industry and technology on our planet since the later decades of the nineteenth century, a recent gradual swerve took place from this dualistic cosmological foundation of modernity to a postmodern secular cosmological monism, which blurs the boundaries between the modern Nature and Culture dichotomy, the physical and the human worlds. In the following I will show how this development has been relentlessly corrosive to the imaginaries and institutions of modern democracy as shaped by the Enlightenment dichotomy between the realm of Nature and the domain of Man, including modern democratic political epistemology.

The main chapters of this book will initially examine the impact of the modern dualistic cosmology upon the emergence of the imaginary[[7]](#footnote-7) of an autonomous self-regulating Nature, a realm of necessity free from God and politics, indifferent to mankind, as well as the parallel formation of a separate realm of human freedom, whereby democratic civic epistemology and voluntary social and political life could evolve. Consequently, history was bound to emerge as the temporal field of human actions. As anticipated by Thomas Hobbes, Giambattista Vico, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, nature and history must be conceptually separated from each other. Kant, furthermore, objected to the persistent tendency to interpret history in terms of a chronology steeped in theological connotations.[[8]](#footnote-8) This shift of perspective opened up the future as a domain whereby human beings may affect the course of history and politics. It was this cosmological shift to dualism that, unsurprisingly, enabled the revolutions of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But the emergence of a new secular monistic cosmology reuniting man and nature may lead to unknown territories.

Whereas political theorists and empirical scientists usually regard cosmology as a subject of theoretical physics, philosophy and anthropology, too remote from politics to be systematically considered, I will aim here to show the actually close links between cosmology and politics and, in the Western case, between the Nature/Culture split and the rise of the epistemological "constitution" of modern democracy and later, its disintegration.[[9]](#footnote-9)

I will argue in this book that the shift from the medieval holistic concept of the universe—as a unity under God of all physical, biological and human entities— to modern dualistic cosmology, particularly since the seventeenth century,[[10]](#footnote-10) has enabled the epistemology of modern democracy and, later, its vulnerability to erosion in the post-modern world. This entropy has been taking place due to a development that some anthropologists call "post-Nature," entailing a shift away from the modern Nature/Culture dichotomy and the rise of a new stage, often called *anthropocene*, indicating the current ubiquitous impact of humanity upon the course and behavior of our planet.

I shall attempt to show that a melting-down of the dualistic cosmology characterizing the modern era, the blurring of the demarcation line between nature and humanity, has constituted the main thrust behind the breakdown of a host of interrelated beliefs and habits of perception. Those traditional beliefs have hitherto underlain and upheld Western imaginaries of civic individualism— including the way whereby causes and effects transpire in politics, the perception and currency of self-evident public facts, the objectivity of experts' competence in almost all fields of knowledge, the very concept of objectivity and, finally, the currently declining faith in the visibility of political power.

In other words, in recent decades, Western politics has been losing the very system of believable political fictions and conventions that had hitherto mediated lay perceptions of politics in democracy. Gone is the tacit social epistemological constitution of modern democratic regimes. That loss is not yet total, but it is dramatic enough to account for the decline of formal and informal democratic institutions and conventions.

The realization that the cosmology of a society affects features of its power and authority structure has been revived in contemporary anthropology. This insight self-evident in the medieval world has been largely transformed and revived by the modern break from medieval holism. This break amounted to a rift from a unified hierarchical view of humanity, whereby God, the creator of the world, fixes the place of humanity and the structure of life. The modern shift to a dualistic cosmology has also clarified the very historicity of cosmology as a foundational collective imaginary of the world. For some thinkers it also marked the rise of modern values, as well as the expression of the human impulse to escape from the confining fixed totality of holism to a freedom enabling cosmology.

A dualistic Nature/Humanity cosmology, as we shall see, has left a vast imaginary of space open for voluntarism. Mary Helms has argued that there is evidence of inalienable connections between cosmologies and politico-ideological frames that legitimate power and —that confer a certain sacrality on it. She further points out that artisans, in premodern societies, mediated between the cosmological and earthly realms, and the repetition of their acts "constantly reaffirms the unquestionable truth, the sacrality of the cosmological system, its organization, and its mode of operation, and thus reaffirms the legitimacy of those political and ideological roles claiming their authority in terms of these cosmological tenets."[[11]](#footnote-11)

I believe that modern societies are no exception. In modern democracy, the equivalent to the external "transcendental" references that have sacralized human beings and human lives were natural law, natural rights and other secularizing versions of life forms. First and foremost, under the modern dualistic cosmology, a transcendental God has transferred its autonomy to the external, the "semi-transcendence" of Nature in relation to humanity. As we shall see in the following, in many respects, the modern equivalent of Helms' artisans, the mediators between cosmology and earthly society and politics, are the scientists, who represent and translate nature into authoritative objects and norms of behavior in the social and political contexts. Inasmuch as cosmologies, as Mary Helms maintains, distribute politically translatable sacredness, the postmodern post-Nature cosmological shift is bound to have profound political consequences.

My argument is that the rise of the modern epistemology of democracy and its radical erosion in our time must, thus, be understood within the context of an earlier revolutionary break away from medieval culture and politics, as well as a contemporary break with the modern Nature/Culture dualism which superseded it. Nowadays, we are experiencing much of the confusions surrounding a transitional period from the remnants of the Enlightenment cultural-political complex to the post-Enlightenment era, that is to a new configuration of foundational imaginaries of world, humanity, culture and power.

These new trends seem to break away from the deep structure of modernity—particularly the imaginary of an autonomous self-regulating Nature and its role in enabling the emergence of modern science, as well as—on the other pole of the Nature/Culture dichotomy—the rise of imaginaries of autonomous societies, voluntary politics, the humanities and the social sciences. If in modernity, culture (including science and technology) has constituted the domain of freedom emancipated from the chains of divine injunctions and natural necessity, in our time the focus has shifted towards a restraining of human mastery, of the human freedom to destroy autonomous Nature.

In retrospect, it becomes clear that, ironically, the "chains of Nature" had played a major role in enabling the condition for the fashioning of democratic conceptions of law, objectivity, a moral constraint and ideals of social harmony.[[12]](#footnote-12) The previous imaginary of an autonomous Nature played a crucial role in construing fundamental categories of democratic epistemology such as public facts, in whose absence the criticism of governments is rendered impotent as well as the metaphorical transfer of concepts of physical causality onto the field of common-sense politics.[[13]](#footnote-13) The imaginary of autonomous nature facilitated, therefore, expectations of governability, accountability and trust in visual representations of political "reality"— all of which have become, under the present conditions, increasingly anachronistic.

I will trace in this book the erosion of the modern concept of Nature as external to human beings and how this notion has been gradually replaced by interactive concepts of nature and society such as *environment*, and later, the still debatable concept of *anthropocene*. I shall pay special attention to the relations between the consequential loss of the former conceptions of the world as an object external to human beings and the derivative categories of political epistemology including objectivity.

My analysis relies, in part on certain anthropological notions. Anthropologist Marshal Sahlins, for example, has famously clarified the difference between the native point of view, which consciously or not impact the shaping of his/her society and order, and that of the outsider anthropologist and historian, which is merely limited to observing and understanding. The latter analyses the imaginary with which the aborigine creates his or her world and traces the relations between this imaginary and the form of life in which the native lives. Sahlins argues that the anthropologist knows that the people's truth is not the historian's; yet, it is the people who make their history, in every sense of the term, and thereby determine their destiny. Similarly, in the case of contemporary democracy, I seek to discern the changes in the "natives''' point of view—the citizens' changing beliefs in the nature and features of democratic politics, in order to understand the decline, in our time, of modern imaginaries and practices of democracy that had evolved since early modernity.

The embodiment of democratic ideals has always been very partial. In many ways, democracy is inherently an impractical regime. The decentralization of political power has often promoted, indeed, greater freedom and, at times, also greater political equality. But it has, as often as not, weakened governability and the imaginary of collective public vis-à-vis private goods. Nevertheless, what has sustained democracy over its long history— as an ideal of rebellion against tyranny and an inspiration for constitutions to protect citizens from arbitrary power— was not only dreams of a social order based upon freedom and equality. No less important has been the faith in the very possibility of self-government, demonstrated already, for all its faults and allure, in the Athenian democracy of the fifth century BCE.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Surely, from the very beginning, the endeavors to create a democratic state were jeopardized by the unbridgeable gaps between praxis and expectations. These gaps had to be narrow enough to sustain even the necessarily deficient institutions, laws and behaviors that were devised to come close to the ideals of a democratic regime. The drive to approximate democracy was fueled also by the fact that this system of government has increasingly acquired the status, it still enjoys today, as the only legitimate form of political power. This is also the reason for the frequent attempt, on the part of authoritarian regimes, to insist that they are democratic.

If democracy is an impractical regime which, at best, is only partially realizable, what could possibly constitute the grounds for the contention I make here that contemporary democracies decay? In the course of the book, I shall attempt to base my argument upon the evidence that the yawning gap between the ideal and the praxis of contemporary democracies has—due to the shift in the foundational imaginary of the dualist cosmology of the modern era— developed into a huge abyss that seems to lead to an historic turning point. I will argue that the present condition that exacerbates a growing skepticism regarding the viability and future of democracy eclipses the optimism and the unwavering faith in political progress which had constituted a major source of its earlier strength; that the distrust of governments which, in some measure, was always compatible with democracy, has become pervasive enough to hamper the functioning of democratic institutions. I also maintain that the very public expectations that had fed the commitment and the endeavor to establish a reform and sustain democratic systems of government have, perhaps, irreversibly diminished.

I do not wish to imply that the age of democracies is necessarily over, but that democracies, in the sense familiar to recent generations, are increasingly becoming a thing of the past. This state of affairs is still largely concealed by the fact that current public political, as well as professional discourse, still frames politics and public affairs in an anachronistic language which fails to capture current political realities— a language which consists of categories forged in an earlier era, carrying the fading remnants of the Enlightenment vision of democracy formulated by thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, the Federalists and by the practice of modern democracies following World War II.[[15]](#footnote-15) The contention I advance here about decay is based upon mounting evidence on the radical erosion of the ways whereby democratic citizens have been hitherto perceiving each other as agents, of how they have ascribed causes and effects to political speeches and actions, grasped natural necessity in relation to voluntary actions and events, believed in the visibility and accountability of democratic governments and attributed responsibility to their governors.

To reiterate in the following pages, I shall aim to show why, among the multiple causes for the gradual modern emergence of democratic social and political epistemology that has mediated the process of democratic politics in modern times, perhaps the most important one has been the structural changes that took place in the deepest layer of Western imagination, in the metaphysical-cosmological foundations of the West—the revolutionary transition of the Western imaginary of the world and the place of humanity from medieval monism to modern secular dualism, which contemporary anthropologists tend to regard as the shift towards a unique modern dichotomy between nature and culture.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In the first part of the book, I shall examine how, prior to the present crisis, the epistemological habits that evolved during the Western Enlightenment became normative and partly institutionalized. I will focus on the implications of the new modern imaginary of nature— autonomous from God and Man—for the rise of the concept of the modern individual as an entity both natural and separate from nature, of civic political epistemology, of modern materialistic common sense and voluntary democratic politics. I will, then, show how they were vital for the sustainability of modern democratic political behaviors, culture, processes and institutions.

In this part I will examine the processes whereby the demarcation lines between Nature and Culture were blurred in our time and the ways in which their former occasional interventions and interpenetrations – those related to the monistic cosmological outlook – have become massive enough to partly return to, partly develop, a new postmodern version of earlier monistic, but this time secular, cosmology.

I will further argue that the particularity of these features of democracy in the West has decisively constrained the deployability of Western-type democracies beyond the West in societies governed by alternative, mostly monistic, often religious, hierarchical cosmologies and, correspondingly, alternative forms of social organization and modes of existence.

In the second part of the book I will examine the five elements of democratic epistemological culture—the invention of the *individual as a political agent, bottom-up and horizontal political causality* that breaks away from the top-bottom vertical causalities of theocracies and monarchies; the emergence of *public facts,* which has superseded, in modern democracies, the authority of esoteric and spiritual entities, the rise of norms of *transparency and visibility* as legitimators of political power, and the norm of *objectivity* and its vast implementation in the political deployment of the authority of scientists, technologists and various experts, in order to objectify policies and decisions in the context of public affairs.

Part three is devoted to the objectifying gaze of science and technology in the political arena and includes a critique on the presumption of contemporary economics to be ‘objective’ and analysis of the virtual objectification of the law.

Part Four traces the decay of the political epistemology of democracy. As a mirror image of part II that elaborates the five foundations of democratic epistemology. I will contend that the increasing fragmentation in the Western naturalistic cosmology separating autonomous Nature from autonomous Culture has increasingly been undermining the basis of human agency, its soul, which has coexisted in modernity with its biological component, thus unsettling modern imaginaries of democratic freedom and citizenship. I will follow the disempowerment of the individual democratic citizen and the accompanying loss of orientation, the collapse of political causality, the rise of ‘alternative facts’, denigration of experts and loss of trust in scientific and other elites, and the degradation status of ‘public facts’ as self-evident and I show how the conception of a shared reality and common-sense are falling apart before our eyes.

Part five summarizes the lessons from the shift between Medieval and Modern Cosmologies. The point of departure is the understanding that in our time, the current loss of Nature as a safe anchor for the epistemological foundations of modern democracy has pushed democracy towards an uncharted future.

In this part I try to answer the question what can we learn from the experience and the strategies enunciated by modern political theorists, such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, Vico and the federalists, who confronted the challenge of imagining and training post-medieval secularizing publics to gradually accept the modern and, later, the democratic human-made state? I will show that the harbingers of early modern political theory had to grapple with the consequential shift from God as the transcendental imaginary of the medieval religious state to Nature as the transcendental of the post-medieval secular state. That struggle has fostered—among other things—the consolidation and the engagement of Nature as a source of authority and rules, as a constraint, as a given distinct from the artificial, as an object of knowledge and as a moral standard.

Further I will examine some of the implications entailed in the conditions and processes underlying the decay of present democracies for the political imagination of future democracies. I will do this through the eyes of twentieth-century thinkers such as Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Claude Lefort and Bruno Latour, who unearthed the weaknesses of contemporary liberal democracy.

In the concluding reflections I will offer an appeal for an ethical-normative anchorage and a moral commitment to rationality as a practical fiction. I will address briefly to the two of the most prominent phenomena of our time: populism and digital revolution as symptoms and catalysators of the current democratic decay. I will suggest that due to the dissipation of the ontological anchorage of modern voluntary and democratic politics on the belief in the relations between an objective, autonomous Nature, and the separate human domain of society and politics, it could be replaced with a moral-political anchorage that may be a pragmatic solution. This may need further elaboration beyond the frames of the present volume, leaving many questions open. Moreover, it would call for new imaginaries that might be developed overtime and yield in turn new, and still unimaginable social realities.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Part I

THE RISE OF WESTERN POLITICS FOLLOWING THE COLLAPSE OF THE MONISTIC MEDIEVAL COSMOLOGY

**Chapter 1**

**Nature as the Transcendental Imaginary of Modern Secular Society – Preliminary Considerations**

Anthropologists and political historians date the crystallization of the modern category of an autonomous Nature mainly to the seventeenth century and consider it also as the turning point towards the rise of modernity. My purpose here is to examine the links between the emergence of this category of Nature as an autonomous entity and the simultaneous rise of modern democracy. Temporal simultaneity or sequence, of course, does not consist a sufficient enough basis for the attribution of causal links. But I will attempt to show that the evidence for the links between the rise of an imaginary of Nature—separated from God and external to culture—and the shaping of the imaginary and practices of modern democracy are compelling.

As we shall see, external nonhuman Nature became a principal political resource in democratic society, a fountainhead of trans-human authority, of concepts such as "necessity" and "constraint," and, most importantly, of the very basis for the main components of modern democratic political epistemology: models and metaphors of factual public social reality and concepts of nonhierarchical political causality. I shall devote the second part of the book to a close analysis of the role played by the modern category of Nature in shaping the specifics of the political epistemology of modern democracy.

In modern scholarly political and legal discourses, modern concepts of Nature are constantly invoked as a limit, a rationale and a source of legitimation for a host of political claims. Suffice it to refer to examples such as Grotius' influential writings on Natural Law and natural rights as checks on arbitrary power;[[18]](#footnote-18) to Hobbes' distinction between "natural men" and "artificial men" and to his discussion on the social contract as an instrument to liberate human beings from the chains of "the natural state of man";[[19]](#footnote-19) to Rousseau's worship of Nature, his view of freedom as a natural gift that need to be protected against the corruptive influence society and government.[[20]](#footnote-20) No less influential has been Rousseau's conception of "natural necessity" as a brake on desires in his theory of education, as well as his insistence that the path taken by humanity from the state of Nature to civilization was irreversible.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Nature was further employed as a means to discipline the use of language and adherence to the law. Pestalozzi, the influential Swiss educational reformer who invented the "object method," followed Rousseau's emphasis on the educational role of observing objects of Nature as a way to discipline the use of language.[[22]](#footnote-22) Kant, outlining his "categorical imperatives," recommended that man should "act as though the maxim of (his) action were by (his) will to become a universal law of nature."[[23]](#footnote-23)

As we shall see later in greater detail, the cosmological dualism separating Nature from Culture contributed, on the one hand, to the evolution of the natural sciences as the study of the regularities that constitute Nature as a system, and to the emerging role of science as a source of apolitical authority in the modern state, legitimizing many of its policies and actions.[[24]](#footnote-24) The assumed authority of scientists to represent the necessities of Nature and the leverages it leaves for mankind became a major frame for collective and individual conduct in politics and other areas. The autonomy of the humanities from the chains of Nature contributed, on the other hand, to studies of human creations from history and philosophy to politics and the arts. Most importantly, an assumed domain of autonomous culture has become a necessary condition for the evolution of the modern self as a moral and civic political entity. The fact that the human individual is both a natural and a cultural entity, actually split by a cosmological dualism, has generated endless tensions between materialism and idealism as parameters of modern conscious human existence.

These very frames have led to the multiple forms and shapes that the imaginary of Nature has assumed as a factor in modern culture, political philosophy, politics, ethics and social practice. Before we systematically pursue the role of the imaginaries of Nature in enabling the epistemology of democratic politics, we need, first, to examine a few aspects of the process that has rendered the imaginary of an autonomous Nature versus an autonomous Culture socially and politically available since the seventeenth century. This analysis will be followed by the attempt to discern the reasons for the diverse appropriations and uses of Nature in the shaping of socio-political epistemological norms that had hitherto mediated the perceptions of political causality and reality.

Recent comparative anthropologists, as well as social and political thinkers, have made a substantial contribution to the unravelling of the factors that have rendered the imaginary of an autonomous self-regulating Nature paramount in modernity.[[25]](#footnote-25) Three interrelated foundational imaginaries are pertinent to our analysis: imaginaries of cosmos, of society and of human beings. Such collective imaginaries span far beyond the projection of ideas and collective beliefs. They do not merely lend themselves to conceptual abstractions, but become actual socio-historical and psychological forces upon assuming hegemony over human and collective social consciousness, beliefs and interaction. They may produce rituals, generate institutions and regulate patterns of behavior which differentiate societies and cultures from one another.

Modern thinkers such as Bacon, Spinoza, Hobbes, Hume, Rousseau, Vico and Burke have appreciated the role played by the collective imagination in the shaping of politics, institutions and behavior. Still, with some important exceptions, the Enlightenment tended to downgrade the imagination as a tool for religious propaganda and a human faculty that endangers the imperial status of reason.[[26]](#footnote-26) This bias was reinforced by the association of the imagination with irrationalism and religious or political radicalism.[[27]](#footnote-27) Moreover, for those who understood or intuited the political power of the collective imagination, it seemed a poor alternative to reason in legitimating a regime and a failure to recognize that the power of human rationality is not a fact but the axiom of the period, of a liberal-political imaginary associated mostly with science and capitalism.

As a force largely emanating from the collective political unconscious, imagination appeared also as fragile and unreliable vis-à-vis trans-human sources of authority discarded by modernity and sanctified by Descartes' concept of allegedly solid human reason. The proponents of the Enlightenment vision of a rational society guided by scientific knowledge consistently criticized the products of [the faculty of] the imagination as destabilizing forces in the human psyche, as well as in society at large. In *Imagined Democracies*,[[28]](#footnote-28) I indicated that these objections to the imagination had led, during the reign of the Enlightenment, to the marginalization of the imagination as a creative social and political force. Characteristically, this trend encouraged the tendency to overlook or deemphasize those sections in the writings of Hobbes, Rousseau and other thinkers that express a deep appreciation for the central role of the imagination in the shaping of politics. Moreover, it belittled the impact of thinkers such as Vico, who directly attributed the rise and decline of regimes to historical fluctuations of the collective imagination and the sequence of diverse hegemonic political imaginaries.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The irony, of course, is that at times when a conscious or deliberate acknowledgement of the creative social and political role of the collective imagination was lacking, the unacknowledged influence of the power of the imagination on the rise and decline of regimes and political institutions pervaded unabatedly. This fact has been thoroughly consistent with the common tendency to overlook, deny, or repress the creative socio-political role, of the modern imaginary of an autonomous Nature as such, but also as a hegemonic collective imaginary in the emergence of modern science and the formation of the modern social and political orders. It has also led to the tendency to circumscribe the perceived "causes" of the modern order to processes such as secularization and the decline of religion—developments that were conterminous with the cultural and political effects of the cosmological bifurcation that separated Nature from God and humanity, superseding medieval holistic cosmology.

The recently reawakened recognition of the critical influence exercised by the diverse modes of the collective imagination has enriched social theory, as well as fostered the advancement and explanatory force of political theory and cultural discourse. Still, as we shall see shortly, the recent refocusing on the collective social and political imagination—salient in the works of thinkers such as Benedict Anderson, Phillipe Descola, Charles Taylor and Bruno Latour—has, nevertheless, left unaddressed the lacuna in the inquiry into the specific impact made by the particular cosmology of the modern West on the emergence of modern democracy, as well as left the question of its recent erosion unanswered.

In the following discussion, I shall relate to the historically protean collective imagination, as a limber factor that, inasmuch as political power, assumes different forms and manifests itself under different guises in diverse political regimes. On account of their scope and apparent remoteness from everyday life and active human consciousness, the links between all-encompassing imaginaries of the world, of nature—generated by the cosmological imagination and features of the political regime, are least obvious to people. I will, therefore, mostly concentrate on the impact made by the historical shifts in the imaginary of autonomous Nature as a cosmological category which has, until recently, been foundational to the emergence of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy.

Our endeavor here is, firstly, to analyze how "autonomous Nature," as a cosmological category, has been transmuted into key terms of mainstream political, ethical, legal, scientific, educational and economic discourses and practices in Western democracy.

Secondly, and more importantly, our objective is supported by the treasure-house of empirical evidence established by ethnographers, as well as by the insights of contemporary comparative anthropological theorists into non-Western societies "governed" by alternative cosmologies and related clusters of imaginaries unifying, or separating along different parameters, human beings and worlds. This wealth of data provides a significant basis for comparisons that shed light on the uniqueness, as well as on the boundaries of the hegemonic Western cluster of imaginaries and practices.

Thirdly, we will substantially resort to works of cultural historians. To overcome the apparent distance between cosmology and socio-political practice, we will rely on scholars—such as the prominent comparative cultural historian Geoffrey Lloyd—who have underscored the extent to which reigning cosmologies influence diverse practices, such as collective and individual attributions of causes, their understanding of and attitudes vis-à-vis physical and biological entities, our perceptions of colors, of agency, of self, of health, and so forth.[[30]](#footnote-30) It is these kind of attitudes that compose the fabric of the social order in any hegemonic regime, including that of modern democracy, as we shall see shortly.

**Chapter 2**

**The Rise of the Western Nature/Culture Dualistic Cosmology from a Comparative Perspective**

In the West, we distinguish between physical and metaphysical cosmologies, between what current astronomical physicists call The Big Bang theory of the creation of our world and those imaginaries of creation, of Nature and of the world that derive from myths, religions and fundamental social and cultural values. Non-Western cosmologies characteristically do not distinguish between physical, metaphysical and cosmological imaginaries which, from a Western perspective, constitute a constraint on the development of science.

This was also the case in the ancient West. Consider the cosmos of Empedocles, of Plato and of the Old Testament book of Genesis, before the dawn of the secularization of natural laws and natural rights, when theological or semi- theological imaginaries linked God, the physical world and Man.[[31]](#footnote-31) The aforementioned modern Western division that has become manifest mostly since the seventeenth century already indicates the deeply consequential break between the physical and the metaphysical, as well as the emergence of a cosmology separating the domains of "Nature" and "Culture." My contention is that this rift, most clearly articulated recently by comparative anthropologist Philippe Descola, not only has given birth to modernity and its crown science, but also to modern democracy.

Moreover, as it became evident during the Enlightenment, this dichotomy has paved the way for the alliance between science and democracy. More precisely, it has grounded the authority of science in "representing" scientifically mediated Nature vis-à-vis social, political, economic and cultural norms at the level of governments, as well as public discourse. It was instrumental also for the assimilation of popular versions of scientific notions of causality and reality, as well as for the shaping of arguments in Western common-sense discourse.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Whereas some people are partly conscious of cosmology, most individuals live involuntarily and unconsciously within the hegemonic cosmological imaginary into which they are born.[[33]](#footnote-33) They take it for granted, inasmuch as in the experience of breathing we usually are unaware of the mechanism that operates inside our bodies. The coexistence of multiple cosmologies in diverse societies and the historical process of their change over time enable reflexive people to recognize that, unlike the respiratory system, cosmologies are not "naturally" fixed givens but both—probably unconsciously—human-made and historically mutable. The stability of hegemonic cosmologies—over centuries and sometimes longer—and the tendency of people living within such hegemonic imaginary of the world to regard it as the sole, incontestable given reality, makes it difficult even for the rare small group of reflexive people to recognize its historicity, to imagine that *the world might be viewed otherwise*.[[34]](#footnote-34)

This realization has led some anthropologists to advocate a sort of "radical cosmology" that would alert people to the possibility of cosmological change; that is, the conscious replacement of hegemonic cosmology by people motivated and guided by the will to live otherwise, to engage in cosmological conversion, perhaps analogous to a collective religious one. A voluntary switch between cosmologies that constitute the most fundamental and entrenched layers of the collective imagination is, indeed, radical, and may be associated with a more taxing sense of freedom and instability than most people might bear. Obviously, also social and political imaginaries change in time, and often faster than cosmological shifts. This suggests that, in some respects, the same cosmology may host more than one particular type of political regime, provided that these regimes share some basic features. The roots of both communism and democracy in the Enlightenment may be a case in point. In both regimes, a shared cosmological division between natural necessity and human freedom released the evolutionary political energies of change.

In sharp contrast to the usually slow shift between cosmologies, the attempt by one society to quickly impose its own cosmological and paradigmatic social and political imaginaries on another is rarely fully successful and raises serious ethical questions. Western colonialism has accrued a problematic record on this matter. Reinforced by its superior powers, the West has attempted to impose its co”ncepts of universal Nature, Knowledge, technology, health, freedom, politics and progress on many non-Western societies under the general banner of modernization, as a process that ostensibly helps "primitive" societies to "humanize" and become advanced. In most cases, Westerners really believed that the Nature/Culture split into which they were born is universal, and so are its offshoots— science and technology.

The specificity of modern Western cosmology stands out more clearly by comparison with its alternatives. Anthropologist Philippe Descola advances a classification of cosmologies—based upon different configurations of physicalities and interiorities—of the material world, including the human body, as well as of the various forms of human spirit, ideas and soul. Thus, he argues:

Faced with some other entity, human or nonhuman, I can assume either . . . [a world whereby] elements of physicality and interiority [are] identical to my own; that both its interiority and its physicality are distinct from mine; that we have similar interiorities and different physicalities; or, finally, that our interiorities are different and our physicalities are analogous.[[35]](#footnote-35)

He suggests to call the first cluster "totemism"; the second "analogism"; the third "animism" and the fourth, hegemonic in the modern West, "naturalism." These four types involve different ontologies, distinct notions of being and becoming.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Anthropologists such as Descola and de Castro argue that whereas Western cosmology sets apart one universal Nature from many cultures, animistic cosmology characteristically harbors a concept of many natures (various natural entities, including human, animal bodies, and inanimate matters, each unique) and of one culture or one consciousness shared by human beings, animals, trees, stones and all other entities.

Descola suggests, on the basis of his ethnographic studies, that, animic collectives, like the Achuar—an Amazonian community between Ecuador and Peru—"many Amazonian societies ascribe to plants and to animals a spiritual principle of their own and consider it possible to maintain personal relations with those entities—relations of friendship, hostility, seduction…. Among the Achuar, the women treat the plants in their garden as children."[[37]](#footnote-37) Animism is also the cosmology that governs the Makuna of Columbia, Amazonia where, by contrast to naturalism—according to Kaj Arhem— human beings, animals and plants possess a "phenomenal form" that distinguishes them from one another and a "spiritual essence" that they all share.[[38]](#footnote-38) Still, as Viveiros de Castro observes, the perspective of each entity on the world is shaped by its unique physical form and its place in the scheme of things.

The third configuration, analogism, is typically expressed in correlations between microcosms and macrocosms and is widespread in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Benjamin Schwartz has characterized Chinese cosmology as a "correlative cosmology."[[39]](#footnote-39) Schwartz quotes Needham's observation that the human order should, but often fails, to "resonate" with the natural one. Assuming that their mandate comes from heaven, Chinese emperors were anxious to demonstrate to their subjects their capacity to be in touch with heaven by anticipating celestial events. With some exceptions, the Chinese world of thought would have hardly seemed plausible in the context of the modern Western sharp dichotomy between natural and socio-historical forces. Schwartz adds that

what correlative cosmology offers is both a sense of the human's dependence on all levels of his being on cosmic forces and yet the exhilarating promise of the capacity on the part of some minds to comprehend these forces [which seem to be eminently 'knowable'] and the power to use this knowledge to achieve an 'alignment' between the human and the natural worlds. [[40]](#footnote-40)

Leaders of the environmental movement were attracted to the harmonious organic holism associated with Asian religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, as a model of respect for the natural environment.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The transition in the west from a monistic, quasi animistic cosmology to the naturalistic one that predominated the West until recently calls for clarification. Whereas the transition from premodern to modern Western dualistic cosmology was gradual, its content has constituted a sharp radical break with the past. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one could still find hybrid views combining premodern and modern conceptions of causality. Such an example is the world of the influential political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli, considered the founding theorist of modern political science. Describing his commitment to a realistic approach to the practice of governing, he argues, in the fifth chapter of his famous *The Prince* (1535): "[I]t appears to me more proper to go to the real truth of the matter than to its imagination; and many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality."[[42]](#footnote-42) But the same Machiavelli also observed in the same book that "it may be true that fortune is the ruler of half our actions, but that she allows the other half or thereabouts to be governed by us."[[43]](#footnote-43) Machiavelli's concept of "fortune," unlike the widespread contemporary denotations of this term, is not yet fully a matter of contingent, chancy and improbable luck. It apparently consists of a violent force beyond the control of the horizontal causality of human actions and interactions, and suggests a significant role for an imaginary of a superhuman "vertical" conception of causality, associated with astrology and premodern cosmology.[[44]](#footnote-44) His yoking of these two views together makes Machiavelli a kind of transitional figure between both periods. The modern twist granted a more commonsensical meaning to "fortune," widely understood as 'luck' or 'misfortune.'

Another aspect of the transitory stage entailed in the shift to a modern mechanistic imaginary of the universe adopted by modern science was the persistent qualification of the autonomy of Nature by the indirect role of God. For Newton, the orderly universe was inconceivable "without the design and domination of an intelligent and powerful being"[[45]](#footnote-45) and, for Leibnitz, given the divine knowledge of the many possible worlds, God created our world as governed by a pre-established harmony of monads.[[46]](#footnote-46) The fact that even religious physicists such as Newton and Priestley discerned the regularities of Nature as if they were an autonomous phenomenon enabled the final detachment of Nature from religion at later stages of scientific advancement.

But even this assertion must be qualified by the observation that the metaphysical foundations of early modern science implied a monotheistic holistic idea of nature as a unified, coherent whole accessible to human knowledge, conceived by God, or by a superhuman intelligent being. Monotheism actually framed the idea of the world as a unified system formed by such a super-intelligent being. The notion of the world as a system, as a whole unto itself, was transferred to the imaginary of a godless, physical Nature in modern dualistic cosmology. In his illuminating book *The Metaphysical Foundation of Physical Modern Science,* Edwin Burtobserves that "[t]hese metaphysical theories and their complementary epistemology largely originated from Judeo-Christian theology." Alexandre Koyré concludes that "[t]he infinite Universe of the New Cosmology, infinite in Duration as well as in Extension…inherited all the ontological attributes of Divinity. Yet only those—all the others the departed God took away with Him."[[47]](#footnote-47)

"When the Devil was banished to hell, God himself was confined to working through natural causes… and private revelations gave way to the notion of a Providence which itself obeyed natural laws accessible to human study,"[[48]](#footnote-48) writes Keith Thomas. Thomas poignantly shows that whereas even eighteenth-century bills of mortality featured instances of death attributed to the "planet," the transition to a dualistic cosmology gave rise to the mechanistic imaginary of the universe and its consequences for structures of human practice. Social attributions of causality became widespread. He observes further that "with the collapse of the microcosm theory [popular in the premodern West] went the destruction of the whole intellectual basis of astrology, chiromancy, alchemy, physiognomy, astral magic…. [And] the notion that the universe was subject to immutable natural laws killed the concept of miracles." Moreover, "[t]he triumph of the mechanical philosophy meant the end of the animistic conception of the universe which had constituted the basic rationale for magical thinking."[[49]](#footnote-49)

All such changes became significant in society and politics when they entered a new commonsensical universe revised by the cosmological shift and the impact of modern science upon popular beliefs and attributions of causes and effects. In other words, the permeation of metaphors and versions of the mechanistic imaginary of the universe into common sense—in the way Vico characterized it, as "an unreflecting judgment shared by an entire social order"[[50]](#footnote-50)—was bound to alter the culture of social and political interaction. Vico held that such a change only partly occurs spontaneously. He believed that the common-sense perspective of the people must be trained and inculcated, especially among the young.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The publication and wide diffusion of new encyclopedias, dictionaries and manuals in the eighteenth century were instrumental for the transformation of modern common sense and for advancing the process of training the public in the mechanistic vocabulary and new perspective on the universe. To those factors, Thomas adds a very important psycho-sociological determinant—the increasing confidence of modern individuals in their own agency, in their capacity to control and not just passively observe the physical and the social worlds.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Despite the cross-cultural wandering of fragments from the cosmologies of totemism, animism and analogism which I will discuss in the following, the Western cosmological category of an "autonomous Nature" separated from "autonomous culture," of physical Nature indifferent to man, seems not only to be a most stable foundation of Western modernity: it has also been the Western category most widely adopted, or imposed, beyond the West, usually through the deployment of practices and technologies associated with modernization. As we shall see, one of the reasons for this extraordinary diffusion of the category of external-objective Nature lies in the instrumental efficacy and global mobility of Western science and technology and in their capacity to stand apart from their enabling cosmology and its derivative ontologies. This apparent cultural and normative insularity of science and technology; the implicit faith that they are respectively just representatives of, or applications derivative from, universal Nature, enhanced their efficacy across cultures. They were usually able to persevere the perception of the norms of neutrality, objectivity and universality that were attributed to them in the context of their original research and theoretical discourse while moving into the socio-cultural context of application roughly until late modernity. This achievement has been a compelling reason for their successful diffusion in Western culture as well.

Both within and without the West, the success whereby scientific and technological practices superseded long-established traditions and conventions has depended, by and large, upon the initial denial of, or indifference to, the human and cultural toll, as well as the ethical problems entailed in the global deployment of a relentlessly aggressive Western instrumentalism. Nevertheless, the assumed, actually fictive, separation of the triad Nature-science-technology from culture and ethics has actually enabled the release of the powerful creative forces of modernity through what came to be regarded as modernization, not only by means of science and technology but also through capitalism and, with significant qualifications, democratic politics.

Still, whereas each of the cosmologies listed above shapes people's *Weltanschauung*, very often they tend to borrow elements from one another. Descola further elucidates this point:

Each of these generative matrixes that structure practice and peoples' perception of the world is not exclusive: animism, totemism, analogism and naturalism can each tolerate a discreet presence of other emerging modes, for each of them is a possible realization of a combination of elements that are universally present. Each one may thus introduce nuances and modifications into the expression of the locally dominant schema, thereby engendering many of the idiosyncratic variations that are customarily called cultural differences.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Whereas "autonomous Nature" has been, perhaps, the most stable cosmological feature of Western modernity, it has been the least likely to be transferable to other cosmological domains. As indicated above what has been transferred either voluntarily, by adoption or by imposition beyond the West, is the narrow instrumentalism of science and technology that, in the West, was rooted in the imaginary of an autonomous Nature bereft of its cosmological roots. There are plenty other examples of selective transfer, such as the globalization of Yoga practices, the popularity of astrological calendars among circles of western middle classes, Chinese food in the West, the influence of American youth culture in China, as well as popular western commodities and ideas that triggered a former Chinese president, Hu Jintao, to warn that China's culture "is being infiltrated by hostile Western forces."[[54]](#footnote-54) Japan's endeavors to adopt aspects of Western democracy have also raised concerns and the demand that in order to preserve the integrity of Japanese politics, the first article in a truly Japanese constitution should be that "harmony must be respected." Obviously, such insistence on consensus could pose serious constraints on the development of democratic politics.[[55]](#footnote-55)

A largely widespread form of transfer among diverse cultures is manifest in techniques that demonstrate instrumental superiority in advancing health, agriculture or communications, which, in their permeation into, or adoption by diverse cosmological domains, are dispossessed of their original symbolic garments that may disrupt or unsettle local clusters of practices embedded in local symbols and beliefs. Foods or martial arts, for instance, tend to acquire either compatible or subversive new meanings in different cultural contexts.

One of the most intriguing presences of a foreign cosmological fragment in the West is animism. Western children up to about four or five years old tend to be animistic like the adults in Amazonia, attributing intentions and mind to inanimate objects and animals. Children books tend to cultivate animistic narratives, infusing them with moral lessons and the like. Obviously, such spontaneous omnipresence of animism among Western children has encouraged, in the West, the thought that animistic cultures are primitive. As we all know, towards adulthood, animism in the West increasingly fades away and is systematically repressed by culture to make room for Western conceptions of causality and the vast category of inanimate objects.

**Chapter 3**

**Risks and Opportunities Inherent in the Unstable Demarcation Lines between Nature and Culture**

The modern dichotomy, or even the schism between Nature and Culture has, nevertheless, constantly unsettled the stability and clarity of Western social and political attributions of causality and responsibility, as well as social perceptions and interpretations of science, history, the arts and politics. The impact of a dualistic cosmology and its dynamic powers has been manifested in frequent fruitful and problematic mergers and detachments of its natural and cultural wings, continually generating contesting natural and cultural accounts of individual and collective behavior.

The recurring need to consider the relative weight of natural versus cultural accounts of human behavior and the reactions to attempts to reduce the one to the other has controlled large parts of the agendas of modern society. The tensions can be discerned, for example, in the competition between the faculties of natural science and humanities in modern universities and between naturalistic and sociopolitical accounts of the generally weaker status of women vis-à-vis men in modern society.

The modern dualistic cosmology, in some respects, turned out to be a powerful and dynamic, if also a risky alternative to the stagnating cosmological monism that preceded it. Professional and public discourses in the modern West furnish many instances of conflicts and border clashes between Nature and Culture, or Nature and nurture—conflicts that keep generating and testing new paths. The repeated controversies on whether average group or individual I.Q. levels are attributable to genetics or to culture and education are one case. An article written by Arthur Jansen, a distinguished psychologist at Berkeley, entitled *"*How Much Can We Boost I.Q and Scholastic Achievement?*"*[[56]](#footnote-56) Predictably provoked fears lest the naturalization of I.Q. and cognitive abilities would undermine the role of education in promoting equality—the justification for a massive allocation of funds for the education of Afro-Americans and other minorities scoring a lower I.Q. average. Among the wider society, the controversy raised the issue of whether inequality is inborn or rather a product of environmental conditions, education and culture. A group of "hereditarians” was quickly formed, spearheading scholars such as Ingle, Shockley, Eysenck and Herrnstein, to defend Jansen's thesis against mounting criticism levelled by leading educational and humanistic authorities and institutions which vehemently rejected his findings.

Not surprisingly, the foundational premise of modern liberal-democratic education and politics, that seemed challenged by genetic accounts of diverse average I.Q. scores among various ethnic groups, contended that it is not the power of the cultural environment— including that of the family, the social and educational ambience of the individual—but rather genetics and other deterministic natural factors that ultimately shape individual and average group cognitive capabilities and intelligence. Such genetic determinism obviously clashed with basic humanistic commitments to the dignity, self-development and freedom of Men/Women. This attempt to subordinate education to natural determinism turned out to be largely unsuccessful, yet it led to a more complex understanding of the joint impact of both Nature and Culture, genetics and environment, and their interaction.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Another highly emotionally and morally loaded example of the undecidability induced by the Nature/Culture dichotomy concerns the use of genetic engineering in the pursuit of various conceptions of human perfectibility, of which the I.Q. score is but one example. Increasingly perfected techniques of gene-editing, such as CRISPR, which has rendered gene slicing far easier, has raised wide concerns regarding the possibility of its misuse.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Michael Sandel observes that, if successful, applying genetic engineering to boost qualities such as athletic capacity, musical talent and the like—what has often been labelled as the case of "designer babies"— would lend parents excessive control over their children's lives, thus limiting the latter's autonomy to choose their own life course. Sandel stresses the difference between such cases and medically motivated genetic interventions aimed to correct genetic causes of disease. With respect to children, the challenge is "to appreciate children as gifts…to accept them as they come, not as objects of our design or products of our will or instruments of our ambition."[[59]](#footnote-59) Here, clearly, value and moral choices shape the boundaries between Nature and Culture that should be respected. Sandel suggests that to regard ourselves as creatures of Nature, God or fortune, relieves us and our parents from responsibility for the way we are.

This recommendation to give Nature its due and to limit cultural (genetic) intervention seems a legitimate unhuman constraint on the encroachment of culture, of parental and geneticists' intervention, onto the sensitive domain of individual self-fashioning.[[60]](#footnote-60) Parental and communal interventions in the fashioning of children's bodies and consciousness are, of course, as perennial as human history. Anabaptism refers, for instance, to a radical Protestant group that refused to baptize infants, insisting that baptism requires the discernment of adults to choose their faith.

Most cultures and traditions socialize infants and children to their values and worldviews by exercising a massive system of conditioning, reinforced by holidays, rituals and, in Judaism and Islam, by circumcision. Modern secularism and liberalism have mitigated such influences by cultivating the values and education of autonomous individualism. For our purposes, the relevance of genetic engineering lies precisely in the question of its place along the very divide of Nature and Culture, between determinism and choice.

The question of how much leverage Nature leaves to consequential human intervention has been raised also with respect to growing concerns over the possible role of pollution in the warming of our planet. Is the problem caused by a ruthless industrial and technological development fueled by capitalism, that leads to the destruction of scarce, non-renewable, natural resources or, rather, by geological and atmospheric processes beyond human control? As of this writing, international public opinion seems to censure global warming deniers.[[61]](#footnote-61)

There are many other examples for debates on the relative impact of Nature and Culture on say, the origins of language, human aggression and wars, human abuse of animals, or human compassion. The Nature/Culture dichotomy appears also to influence attempts to classify peoples and objects.

Particularly illuminating is the debate, that was launched decades ago and is still bubbling about the categorization of the Pygmy tribes that live in East-Belgian Congo in Park Albert, whose average height is a hundred and fifty centimeters (they are present also in Malesia, Thailand and Australia). Around 1990, a stormy debate broke out again among anthropologists, environmentalists and others, on whether pigmies are the survivors of primordial tribes that lived thousands of years ago in Nature, outside human history. Do they represent prehistory's autochthonous people, who inhabited in pure virgin Nature, unspoiled by human civilization, noble primitives from the times of perennial Nature, coexisting in full harmony with rare protected species, or are they merely another human group that threatens its primeval environment and must be restricted?[[62]](#footnote-62) The case in point illustrates both the tension between Nature and history under the dualistic Western cosmology, the ambiguities in defining their boundaries and the fact that the Nature/Culture dualism generates alternative, often competing, perspectives and framings of experience, which resist a final absolute resolution.

Given man's continual oscillation between his own and his society's dualism of Nature and Culture it was very apt for Friedrich Hegel to call man an "amphibian animal…driven [always] from one side to the other, [an animal.]…that cannot find satisfaction for itself in either side."[[63]](#footnote-63) Elaborating on this theme, Robert Pippin observes that being amphibian implies our ability "to understand ourselves as both corporeal bodies, part of material nature, and also meaning-making, reason- responsive subjects, not merely objects." Human beings have both natures and histories.[[64]](#footnote-64)

This idea is raised by Hegel in reference to his position on art. Hegel argues: "Art by means of its representations, while remaining within the sensuous sphere, liberates man at the same time from the power of sensuousness…. [B]y dissolving this unity [with Nature] for man, art lifts him with gentle hands out of and above imprisonment in Nature."[[65]](#footnote-65)Again, the material-sensuous combines with creativity to serve as a bridge between Nature and freedom. The connection between the very meaning and shared understanding of art, therefore, renders aesthetic experience a vital context for modern self-understanding.[[66]](#footnote-66)

From the perspective of the liberal open-ended worldview, the ambiguity inherent in the demarcation lines between Nature and Culture has contributed the virtue of undecidability between such competing frames, creating a range of possibilities to enlist the authority of nature in order to reinforce or diminish that of culture and politics, as well as vice versa—enlisting culture to curb the authority of natural determinism. Finally, it facilitated the amalgamation of both in varying proportions, as in technology, medicine and the arts. This cosmological dualism, no doubt, has proved an important source for the unique dynamism of the modern West.

The contemporary debate on whether the Holocene epoch of a stable, autonomous Nature is being replaced by the Anthropocene— the era of human massive impact on the shape of Nature— again gives raise to the extreme positions vis-à-vis Nature's full self-determination versus its status as an object pliable to the mastery of human beings. I tend to concur with Paul Wapner, who neither sides with scholars who argue that we live now after the "end of Nature" nor with those who maintain that currently we inhabit a world in which the natural environment has been totally humanized. He opts for the hybrid frame, whereby the natural and the postnatural coexist.[[67]](#footnote-67) But, as I will argue in the following, even in the hybrid version of a realm of Nature both given and separated from man and humanized, the epistemological constitution of modern democracy, premised on an autonomous Nature separated from and external to human beings, could not be sustainable.

Another conspicuous expression of the clash between Nature and Culture is manifested in the controversy between social groups that define themselves in biological terms and those which opt for a cultural or ideological self-definition—between organic and associative imaginaries of human grouping. Such differences between collectives that define themselves vis-à-vis imagined blood relations, skin color and narratives of a common primordial father or mother, versus civic collectives that regard themselves as voluntary associations of free individuals, have far-reaching political implications. Such groups tend to develop very different criteria of membership and exclusion. When these two opposing sociopolitical imaginaries of the state, as the state of all its citizens and—in the case of Israel, Poland and Hungary—a state of an ethnically defined national majority (even a tribe) coexist, conditions become conducive for the rise of authoritarianism.

Despite the persistent, abovementioned ambiguities concerning the demarcation lines between Nature and Culture, the epistemological constitution of modern democracy has implied a firm notion of an autonomous external Nature versus an autonomous domain of culture. The notion of an autonomous nature as an object of science has endorsed popular common-sense versions of semi-scientific "objective factual reality," as well as of discernable political causality.

These two fictions, objective reality and "material" political causality, have served as the foundation for the political epistemology of modern democracy and of the ability of citizens and governors to imagine that they can make sense of their political experience and communicate. We shall turn now to a more detailed elucidation of this thesis.

Part II

THE EMERGENCE OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSTITUTION OF MODERN DEMOCRACY

**Introduction**

Like a monarchic, fascist, nationalist or any other type of regime, a democracy is predicated on, and is tacitly regulated by an implicit structure of shared epistemological norms and habits of perceiving power, authority, and other political things. In this book, I argue first, that habits of perception enable the viability of a particular socio-political order. Second, such habits consist of epistemological categories that derive from both the hegemonic cosmology and from basic social values. Third, the values themselves are related to a dominant political imaginary of order. [[68]](#footnote-68) Hence, it is the political imaginary and its corresponding epistemology that mediate or link cosmology and politics.

It is important to realize that the epistemological constitution of a regime consists in a cluster of interrelated elements. The first factor of democratic political epistemology is, of course, the *voluntary individual*—the perceiving and judging subject who is the subject of rights and the source of authority that, together with his fellow citizens, possesses the power to legitimate and delegitimize the government. This imaginary of the voluntary individual is largely dependent upon the separation of man and nature and on assessing the imaginary of Nature as external and indifferent to man. The voluntary individual will be the first element of democratic epistemology to be discussed in the following. As we shall see, there are many regimes which lack this imaginary—or the very concept of the voluntary individual— as well as the imaginary of an external autonomous nature.

Lacking common notions of political reality, causality, power and other shared political perceptual elements, a political order—the very condition of a relatively stable regime—is replaced by randomness and chaos. The argument elaborated later about the erosion of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy presents, therefore, a very strong claim about a radical transformation, or even disintegration, of current democratic regimes and their anchor in an independent imaginary of nature and its derivative elements, such as voluntary individuals.

I will, thus, begin by examining the first and most important element of democratic epistemological culture—*the perceiving, speaking and acting individual as a political agent, a democratic citizen*. Then, I shall turn to the epistemological category of *bottom-up and horizontal political causality* that breaks away from the top-bottom vertical causalities of theocracies and monarchies. Subsequently, I shall explore the emergence of the epistemological category of *public facts,* which has superseded, in modern democracies, the authority of esoteric and spiritual entities. I will, next, address the closely related rise of norms of *transparency and visibility* as legitimators of political power and their epistemological indicators. Finally, I will discuss extensively the norm of *objectivity* and its epistemological indicators, as well as its vast implementation in the political deployment of the authority of scientists, technologists and various experts, in order to objectify policies and decisions in the context of public affairs.

**Chapter 4**

**The Imaginary of the Modern Democratic Individual as a Political Agency**

Under cosmological monism, all entities, organic and nonorganic, compose a single undivided whole. By separating the world from man, Western secularized cosmological dualism has facilitated and catalyzed the remarkable formation of the modern individual and its capacities for introspection, autonomy, agency, as well as its positioning *qua* subject that may observe the world and act *on* it. The development of the modern individual has established, as an incontestable fact, that human beings are both organisms and interiorities, both bodies and souls. This Western naturalistic cosmology has generated a split between the materiality of human bodies as belonging to the physical world, on the one hand, and the autonomous mind and spirit of the human individual as separate from the physical world, on the other.

This division has enabled both a biological science of man, such as the study of the human brain and, conversely, the humanistic study of human creations in the vast areas of religion, poetry, music, philosophy, historiography, and the arts. In short, Western cosmology has enabled the parallel evolution of the natural sciences and the humanities. According to Philippe Descola, "the belief that prevailed in the first ages of modernity [was] that the splendid otherness of Nature is necessary for the manifestation of the specific qualities of humanity."[[69]](#footnote-69)

Again, a comparison with cosmological animism may be instructive. In animism there is no object—such as the world— which can be experienced as the other, as the manifestation of an external otherness in relation to Man. What the modern West imagines as the external world is, for animists, a profusion of relations and interactions with the variety of organic and inorganic entities within an inclusive whole. Under animistic cosmology, such dualistic division between human beings and all the rest, between creatures endowed with agency and choice, individuals whose behavior consists of combining their bodies and interiorities, and animals, whose behavior is naturally driven, probably lacking reflection, is probably inconceivable. In animism it is the shape of the body, be it organic or physical, that determines the specific perspective of an entity. Posing a generalized subjectivity that is particularized by body shape, the animist theory of knowledge, argues Descola,

[Is] clearly poles apart from the cognitive realism to which most of us adhere spontaneously… This [animistic] interiority is shared by almost all beings, all entities in the world from what we perceive as human individuals to trees and stones, but the mode of their 'subjectivization' depends on their material or organic envelopes.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Perhaps the most instructive feature of animistic cosmology is that, unlike the perception of individuals in our naturalistic dualistic cosmology, it refuses to limit subjectivization to human beings alone. Nonhumans are not just animals or things. They are subjects endowed with interiorities and consciousness comparable to ours, but whose bodies are shaped differently. But for some salient exceptions—such as the views held by some contemporary cognitive neuroscientists—the modern Western outlook insists on the irreducibility of the individual's interiority to its physicality, and also on the unique character and standing of human interiority and subjectivity in comparison with the possible awareness lacking selfhood of some animals. There were, of course, many significant premodern antecedents to the modern secular versions of the division or relations between individual bodies and interiorities. Hellenistic individualism bore the world-renouncing sage who withdraws from society to seek absolute autonomy. Spiritual heroic asceticism and individual self-discipline, seeking liberation from the fetters of the physical world and the overwhelming power of emotions, was a familiar topos in Antiquity and the Middle ages, anticipating the later secularized dichotomy of man and the world as a foundation of modernity and its enterprises. Peter Brown has pointed out[[71]](#footnote-71) that St. Augustine has not only made a major endowment to the Western development of reflexive interiority in his *Confessions* (fourth-century CE), but also has contributed to the demystification of the world. Of course, even the secular modern imaginary of Nature derived some of its normative force from its theological roots in divine creation. It is important, however, when we speak about its religious sources, to remind ourselves that the fact that elements of the modern cosmological imaginary have their roots in monistic cosmologies of religions does not entail continuity between their respective derivative ontologies of "reality" and related epistemologies.

The historical rise of the secular imaginary—based upon the rift between Nature and man, that has acquired a dominant position and a regulatory cosmological status since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries— is echoed in the philosophical discourse of the time, in the works of influential thinkers such as Hobbes and Descartes, Locke, Rousseau, Hume and Kant. As we shall see, these and other thinkers were attracted by the rich possibilities opened up by the separation of Man and Nature to evolve human agency as the maker of politics and enlist Nature, as a transhuman "transcendental" source of given universal rights to protect individual freedom in the domain of society and politics. Most clearly, in Kant's dualistic approach, there is a coexistence between human phenomenal appearance and an unthinkable inaccessible world of things-in themselves. Later we will discuss how modes of deploying Nature were enlisted by the social authority of science and technology to empower the modern state.

On the interpersonal-social level, Rousseau exercised a particular influence by elaborating on the ways in which Nature may play a crucial role in educating man to convert a necessary external natural constraint into an internal restraint or discipline. What drew Rousseau to enlist an external physical Nature in order to inculcate constraint and restraint, to limit human actions unmediated by others—in a world in which God no longer possesses its former powers to punish— is the impersonal-amoral external authority of Nature, regarded as an autonomous self-regulating whole indifferent to man.

The externality and the indifference of the world of things vis-à-vis human beings led Rousseau to form the ideal postulation that dependence upon things rather than on human beings protects human freedom from corruption, precipitated by command, competition, unnatural social constraints, arbitrariness and public opinion.[[72]](#footnote-72) Whereas man is born free and may enlist Nature to protect his freedom against the arbitrary influence of other men, still his/her own passions, exacerbated by an enslaving social competition and the craving for love and reputation, are their worst enemies.[[73]](#footnote-73) I have discussed in detail elsewhere how the authority of a Nature external to society was translated from Nature to science, regarded as representing the otherness and the necessities of Nature. It is this authority of science which could be extensively deployed by governments and politicians as a political resource exploited to yield impersonal scientific justifications for the scope and limits of their actions.[[74]](#footnote-74)

In his theory of private property, John Locke imagined that when individuals imprint, through labor, the inner elements of their personality upon external objects, shaping things by virtue of their will and talents, they actually appropriate them as their own, as part of an extended concept of their personality. Rousseau, in his *Essay on the Origins of Inequality*, demonstrates his uncompromising antagonism to the conversion of parts of Nature into private property, thus enhancing inequality. Locke, by contrast, saw the need to protect private property as a major cause for the evolution of society, law and the state. What is important to our discussion is the extent to which both these influential modern thinkers, as well as other participants in the discourse on man at the time, developed their conceptions of the free individual by both exploiting and negotiating the relations between Nature and freedom, materialism and ethics, thus positioning civilized men as belonging to different domains, the given and the appropriated.[[75]](#footnote-75)

At the center of the modern secular view there stands, of course, the strikingly influential Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. Descartes afforded, perhaps, the clearest and most distinct philosophical articulation to the dualistic-naturalistic cosmology of the modern West. He opens his *Essay on Man* by asserting, "First I must describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us."[[76]](#footnote-76) Beyond the multiple contesting interpretations of Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am," the important point for us is his positing the power and autonomy of thought (or the mind) vis-à-vis the mechanical imaginary of the body. Descartes clearly positions the mind at the center, which, in his view, enables an individual human being to be rational and free, and recognize valid representations of the external world.

In sharp contrast to animistic epistemology, what for Descartes determines the perspective of the individual on the world is not the shape of the human body but, as Charles Taylor aptly asserted, the bodily disengaged perspective of reason.[[77]](#footnote-77) By maintaining that Man regards natural bodies through his cognitive-spiritual powers as mechanical entities, Descartes takes the demystification of Nature to a new level, endorsing both the secularization as well as the rise of science and technology. Eventually, the flourishing of science in modern democracies has reinforced the objectification of the natural world and—by means of analogy and metaphor—has made a decisive impact on the emergence of technology as well as the instrumental concept of politics.[[78]](#footnote-78) The Cartesian separation of mind and matter has preempted the kind of constraints involved in their cosmological convergence, which block the local development of science under monistic cosmologies.

Whereas for Descartes reason is the seat of individual autonomy, Rousseau adds to the modern understanding of an individual, freed from the chains of Nature, the ontology of the individual's emotional interiority— the inner reflexive dialogue of the self with its own feelings and emotions, as well as the human flow of emotional responses to other people and the external world. By narrating his own autobiography as a history of his emotions, of what he felt in the course of time, Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782-9) makes a plea for the role of emotions as an integral component of authentic interiority and individuality. Rousseau's "I feel before I think," differs, indeed, from Descartes' cogito argument. Eventually, such an approach has opened up the way for the combined role of voluntary agency and emotions in politics, no less than Descartes' contribution to the combined role of voluntary agency and reason. Rousseau's individual emotions are neither subject to discipline by reason nor accounted for by bodily movements, as described in some sections of Descartes’s *Passions of the Soul*. [[79]](#footnote-79)

Differences of the kind we discern between Descartes and Rousseau, Locke and also— as we shall note later— Spinoza, illustrate the instability and ambiguities induced by the dualistic cosmology in characterizing individual body-interiority relations. Even Descartes, contrary to common and popular interpretations, made assertions both about "internal emotions which are produced in the soul only by the soul itself" and those that are physiologically triggered in the brain. He crowned the pineal gland in the brain as "the principal seat of the soul," the locus where the mind exerts its power over bodily functions.[[80]](#footnote-80)

This controversy is reflected also in the position of Hume. Hume had joined that discussion by famously asserting in his *Treatise on Human Nature* that "reason is, and ought to be, the slave of emotions." Bereft of emotions, desires or passions, reason alone cannot move us to choose and act. It cannot give rise to moral behavior. Rejecting the weight granted by Descartes to autonomous reason as part of the soul, his above qualifications notwithstanding, Hume's perspective on emotions tends to tilt the weight over to the role of the natural body, emotions, and the imagination, which often stresses one side of the nature-mind dualism. Such variations on body-mind relations opened up by Western dualistic cosmology have enabled ways of conceiving human associations and politics unthinkable in Asian, African and Middle-Eastern societies, which have evolved under more unified foundational imaginaries of the world and under the supreme entity of God.

Spinoza is, in some sense, an exceptional voice in this early modern Western philosophical discourse, in his positing that the world consists of one all-encompassing substance; body, emotions, soul and mind are just different attributes or modes of that same substance. Whether man is led by reason or solely by desire, everything he does corresponds—according to Spinoza—to the laws or rules of Nature.[[81]](#footnote-81) Not surprisingly, the contemporary decline of modern cosmological dualism (discussed in the last chapters of this book) leads to a revival of Spinoza, whose cosmology and philosophical theory seem closest to totemic cosmology. Whereas for Spinoza both the passions and the weaker faculty of reason are rooted in Nature, by insisting on the dominant impact of natural passions on human actions, he develops a version of Hobbesian political realism and actually modernizes a monistic holistic cosmology.

Philippe Descola quotes Adolphus Elkin, who worked on Australia's totems, asserting that totems are "but an expression of the idea that man and nature form one corporate whole— which is living and social."[[82]](#footnote-82) It is ironic, but not surprising, that contemporary neuroscientists—themselves adherents of the belief in the autonomy of science *qua* inheritors of the prominent Nature/Culture split—whose research, reinforced by their theoretical perspective, have led them to seek evidence for the unity of mind and body, find inspiration in Spinoza's materialism. This, of course, is another example for the mobility of cosmological fragments, marginal to the modern Western hegemonic cosmology, and their ability to penetrate its center. In this case, the possibilities of anchoring materialistic sources of passions in a central seventeenth-century philosophical figure such as Spinoza has provided powerful support.[[83]](#footnote-83)

If Spinoza's metaphysical holism appeared to challenge the modern cosmological-metaphysical dualism separating world and the human mind, Descartes' radical elevation of reason as a source of certainty beyond the senses was also subject to wide criticism. Analogous to the Hobbesian objection to the idea of individual conscience, which he saw as a potentially dangerous source of an asocial subversive sense of individual certainty, such worries were raised also in the case of Descartes. While traditional learning was public and had served as a basis for the social order, Descartes' method of introversion was completely private.

Some critics pointed out to the dangers of such extreme reliance on the "inner light" of reason for both Christianity and society; others, such as Meric Casaubon in his *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1656), "regarded this disengagement of mind from the senses as pathological, a manifestation of melancholy."[[84]](#footnote-84) Descartes' critics believed that his method of moving from a stage of radical doubt to a stage of radical certainty by virtue of autonomous reason was bound to lead to madness. As such, he was regarded as an enthusiast rather than a rationalist. This was also the rationale behind the corollary of Descartes' critics, who professed that he had failed to offer a remedy to the problem of "enthusiasm," to the dangerous spreading of false prophets claiming direct divine inspiration (associated, since the fifteenth, throughout the first decades of the eighteenth centuries, with radical Protestants and religious sectarians). Such religious enthusiasm served both their radical challenge to established religious authority and their political violence.

Not surprisingly, for the apologists of The Royal Society of London, the new experimental philosophy— science—was the best antidote to enthusiasm. A clear seventeenth-century criticism on Cartesian dualism, on his supposed readiness to forsake the senses and rely exclusively on the mind, was launched already by Robert Burton (1577-1640), a leading advocate of interpreting enthusiasm and melancholy "in medical terms."[[85]](#footnote-85) Burton "relied on the long medical tradition which saw enthusiasm as a symptom of the disease of melancholy, and appropriated that tradition for his polemical religious purposes."[[86]](#footnote-86)

To the extent that such attributions of material corporeal sources for "unreason" were identified with the role of Nature— with the human body— in limiting reason, we can see here an opening path for the ethos and educational programs of progressive liberal democratic advocates to civilize and educate people in order to reduce the impact of the body, and body culture as well as passions and increase the role of mind over matter. Conversely, most radical materialist theories of the human mind were exploited to substantiate the exclusion of women and other human categories from the realm of political freedom.

Such controversies not only illuminate the ambiguities induced in modern Western dualistic cosmology by the unclear boundaries between natural and artificial, body-related and mind-related conceptions of the human individual, but also of conceptions of the potential or actual role of individuals as social and political causes, and their capacities for religious, moral, ideological and political life. These uncertainties were not only a symptom of cultural instability, but also opened up in the West a wide space for creative innovations and changes in all the above fields.

I should reiterate that my interest here lies neither in rendering an historical account of modern discourse on the relative role of Nature and Culture in the shaping of the modern individual as such, nor in evaluating the validity of the polar oppositions in the approaches to this subject. It is, rather, to underscore the effect of Western cosmological dualism on the formation of imaginaries of modern individualism as distinct from its effects on science, and later, the social, political and cultural worlds. Hence, natural or cultural-humanistic reductionism of human individuality and conduct are not pertinent to the discussion on the valid ontology of the modern individual, but are necessary in order to examine the political implications of the inherent undecidability concerning the ontological and ethical makeup of the modern individual.

According to my perspective on the formation of Western democracy, the primary interest lies in the recurring social, cultural and political resistance to the reduction of imaginaries of human inwardness to the individual's body. In many respects, Giambattista Vico's insistence on the links between the human imagination and political history has afforded a major contribution to the protection of the imagination as a faculty of the human mind against its "downgrading" by physiologically framing it as part of the body rather than the mind.

The insistence on the autonomy of human mental capacities and individual judgment has represented a foundational commitment to human agency, to democratic epistemology and freedom, which comprise the principal conditions for liberal democracy and the main components of its imaginary. Many aspects of the above controversies point to the persistent challenges to the status of agency and freedom as crucial features of democratic individualism. Very often, imaginaries of materialist human ontology have been pitted against imaginaries of irreducible human agency, reason and freedom, vouched by a dualist cosmology. In this context, to advance the human body as the ontology of human thoughts, imagination, emotions and actions has often—knowingly or unwittingly—served but as a strategy for undermining constitutive political imaginaries of Western democratic regimes. Clearly, then, cosmological dualism might have, and actually has given rise to such competing ontologies and epistemologies of politics.

Social sciences between naturalism and voluntarism

I should note that the emergence of social sciences, primarily since the later nineteenth century, expressed the power of the commitment to social epistemology and voluntarism in human affairs. The "voluntarists" consisted of sociologists and philosophers such as Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton. The opposing camp (The “naturalists”) included, of course, prominent social and sociological thinkers such as Herbert Spencer, Francis Galton, and William Sumner and, to an extent, Sigmund Freud.[[87]](#footnote-87) On the whole, the social sciences have assumed a middle ground and have sought to strike diverse balances between naturalistic[[88]](#footnote-88) and voluntarist notions of socio-political causality. Economics tended to lend more weight to human material desires and was, therefore, more susceptible to naturalization, whereas politics, with important exceptions—to human voluntarism. I shall return to this significant matter later on in our discussion.

Moral and political perspectives on scientific and technological innovations are often slow in response to their applications. But when they do, they often trigger eruptions of social, moral and political contests over risky precedents and transgressions that disrupt the fragile balance between natural and sociocultural dimensions of human life, between biology, environment and human values and interiorities. The development, in America and other democracies, of social indicators (of poverty, educational performance, distribution of income and of public policy benefits) largely in response to the disproportional impact of far narrower economic and statistical indicators is a case in point.[[89]](#footnote-89) The development of such social indicators since the 1960s is illustrative of the urge to balance instrumental economic assessments of costs and benefits of scientific and technological innovations with normative criteria of social choice in grappling with social problems and the need to navigate public policy also in light of quality of life measures. [[90]](#footnote-90)

On the oscillation of the demarcation line between human inwardness and biology, very instructive contests are discernable also in psychoanalysis, human behavioral genetics, and, as we showed earlier, genetic engineering. Regarding psychoanalysis, conflicting attempts to naturalize Freudian theories of the psyche and appropriate them for natural conditioning of human beings are a case in point. Deliberating on the clash between modern materialistic psychological theories which reduce the "soul" to physiological processes and theories that underscore the powers of the human soul, Jonathan Garb, a scholar of Kabbalah and psychology of religion, recalls that "Otto Rank forcefully criticized Freud for his denial of the centrality of the soul for psychology while camouflaging its presence by means of the ideology of scientism."[[91]](#footnote-91) Ernest Jones, a Welsh neurologist and psychoanalyst, went as far as call Freud the "Darwin of the mind." American historian of science Frank Sulloway notes that "indeed, once he had finally achieved his revolutionary synthesis of psychology and biology, Freud actively sought to camouflage the biological side of this creative union."[[92]](#footnote-92) In America, Sulloway writes, "Freud's theories have consistently been reinterpreted . . . in a more environmentalist, and hence more psychological vein."[[93]](#footnote-93) Likewise, the German-American historian Peter Gay attributes a larger role to Freud's biology, albeit less dramatically. For Freud, he argued, "[t]he mind was the outcome of the cooperation—as well as the competition—of necessity and freedom, of Nature and nurture. … Fundamental to Freud's theory of mind is that it is part of nature, quite as orderly, quite as subject to causal pressures as any physical entity."[[94]](#footnote-94)

The naturalization of lower scholastic achievement—for instance, during the I.Q. abovementioned controversy—even when proven false, has been geared to invalidate the role of education and environmental enhancement in improving individual performance and, by assuming to deterministically establish the individual's limits, is obviously injurious to individual human freedom and dignity. Also, as we have noted, resorting to genetic engineering in order to enhance parents' preferences by annulling the status of human traits as "gifts of Nature," thus replacing given Nature by its cultural manipulations with the intention to influence the formation of individual identity, ironically entails a gross loss of freedom and dignity.

Generally speaking, any successful attempt to eradicate the imaginary that resists the intervention of human beings in the given nature of human beings or endorses the naturalization of individual personality and cognitive traits would, above all, appear to undermine the imaginary and behavioral foundations of democracy as the regime of human freedom and voluntary deliberate agencies. We, then, have been living in the modern West with the advantages and pitfalls of two competing ontologies and with their respective boundaries and symbiosis: the naturalistic, that has grounded physical reality, and the cultural— that has grounded social and political realities as the fabric for the collective imaginaries of our period. More generally, anchoring our conceptions of Nature’s and Culture's respective autonomies in cosmological sources and the respect for their particular boundaries have furnished them with sufficient credibility in modern Western common sense, dispensing with the need to invoke divinity, theology and sacredness.

*Nature as a Cultural Resource*

Now I will turn to a very different emphasis on the role of Nature in the formation of the Western self. Whereas modern dualistic cosmology enabled the idea of civilization as an escape from Nature, it also opened up the possibility of Nature as a shelter for the individual, a place to which the individual could get away from society into a space free from the gaze and noise of humanity, where the self could silently reflect on its existence and listen to its inner life. As a retreat from society, solitude in Nature entails also an evasion from the responsibilities of politics and citizenship. Nevertheless, when limited in time, it is potentially important for the shaping of free, reflective and active individual agency.

Philippe Descola observed that one of the legacies of the Romans was the polarity between wild and domesticated landscape. That polarity was blurred in the West during the long medieval period and was revived particularly during the nineteenth century, "when Romanticism invented wild Nature":

It was the time when essayists advocating the philosophy of the 'wilderness' such a Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir urged their compatriots to seek in the mountains and forests of America an existence more free and authentic than the one for which Europe had long provided the model. It was also the time when the first national park was created, at Yellowstone, as a grandiose representation of the work of the deity. From being gentle and beautiful, Nature now became wild and sublime.[[95]](#footnote-95)

The grounds for the idea that Nature can remedy and restore the individual's authenticity and autonomy; that society corrupts, have been laid down, of course, by Rousseau in the eighteenth century and by nineteenth-century German and British Romantic poets and philosophers.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Modernity thus gave birth to two opposing imaginaries of Nature in relation to mankind: on the one hand, the materialistic mechanico-scientific and, on the other, the spiritual poetical imaginary of Nature— imaginaries respectively reflecting the values of human mastery and reflexivity, resonating with man's materiality and interiority. These two basic imaginaries of Nature have corresponded to the historical movements of the Industrial Revolution period and the Romantic era, as two distinct, often contradictory and contesting manifestations of human desires and experience.

The arts have often reflected this dichotomy as the polarity between the world, as the object of the gazing subject—for instance, in the genre of Realism in painting—and the world as the stage of human history, heroism, spiritual quest and mortality. Erwin Panofsky observed that with the advance of epistemology and natural philosophy, the "vision of the universe is, so to speak, detheologized." The world that appears as an object is framed by the perspective of the individual. Referring to the central vanishing point of perspective representation in painting, Panofsky observes that, as such, the impression of representation is "determined not by the objective lawfulness of the architecture, but rather by the subjective standpoint of a beholder who has just now appeared."[[97]](#footnote-97) Moreover, "perspective in transforming the *ousia* (reality) into *phainomenon* (appearance) seems to reduce the divine to a mere subject matter for human consciousness; but for that very reason, conversely, it expands human consciousness into a vessel for the divine."[[98]](#footnote-98) The divine, however, remained at the foundation of the experience of Nature as—among other things— a carrier of the moral authority of natural rights and natural law and as an element in the power of Nature that induces a sense of the sublime.

Another aspect of the relation between painting and the individual relates to the genre of Realism. By contrast to medieval symbolic and mythological painting, Realism in art has responded both to the confirmation of the individual as a witness to the fidelity of painting to the representation of a world independently recognized in our daily life, and to the contemporaneity of art as an event in our time-capsule as mortal individuals. Both aspects relate, of course, to Realism as the particular genre of democratic art, of art accessible to all and as representing the familiar world.[[99]](#footnote-99) Both aspects combine to enhance the participation of multitude of individuals in the cultural as well as the political orders. It, thus, facilitates the confirmation of public trust in its gaze, and in the appearing common-sense world as the epistemological arena of democratic politics.

"Reality" and Realism have manifested, of course, many other faces and uses, as in political protests against hidden suffering and exploitation (Courbet, Rivera), an indictment against the cruelties of war (Goya), and as a window to human inwardness, for example—a couple of centuries earlier— Rembrandt's self-portraits. By contrast, other genres of painting focused on human actions, such as history painting (Delacroix), individual heroism (Jacques-Louis David), spiritual-harmonic quest (Whistler) and human mortality (Munch).

It is instructive to compare, through the prism of painting, the centrality of the autonomous individual in the modern West and its subordinate place in a culture such as Japan's. The central place of the individual *qua* witness or observer and as a subject for depiction and representation in Western art has profoundly differed from the Japanese "quest for unity with Nature." This tendency is expressed, among other things, in the devaluation of the individual vis-à-vis the environment in landscape painting. In contradistinction to Western culture, the Japanese does not acknowledge the dichotomy between the autonomous individual and autonomous Nature.[[100]](#footnote-100) Moreover, the individual Japanese personality "is conceived as embedded in social relations or contexts and is to a great extent defined in term of its place in such contexts."[[101]](#footnote-101) Despite the dualism between the inner and the outer person, the individual is always perceived in terms of his "universe of belonging as well as a hierarchical sets of roles and duties."[[102]](#footnote-102)

The Western perceiving, judging and voluntarily acting individual is, then, the cornerstone of modern Western democratic political epistemology. But, as we observed above, she/he must have fashioned epistemological frames for perceiving the causal processes that make up the fabric of democratic politics. This is the subject of the next chapter.

**Chapter 5**

**Democratic Political Causality**

From a comparative perspective, one may discern alternative conceptions and perceptions of causality in diverse regimes. A top-down vertical-hierarchical causality characterizes religious, traditional and authoritarian regimes, whereas a combination of bottom-up and horizontal (interactive) causalities characterizes democracies. Neither type of political causation appears in a pure form. But as an epistemological factor in the perception of the modus operandi and manifestations of power, a significant recurrence of one of these social attributions of causality is crucial for the character of a regime and its principles of manifest or implicit legitimations. A third type of political causation, perhaps the most frequent, is a combination of the two above modes, whereby the vertical hierarchical causality appears in a secular version and is justified in instrumental terms.

In democracies, anti-vertical hierarchical and bottom-up and horizontal political causalities are expected, normative, and symbolic of the legitimate sources of authority. In a democratic polity, attributing political acts and events to a transcendental agency or to the charisma of a superhuman leader is both unacceptable and illegitimate. An illuminating example of the destructive coupling of divinity with earthly political acts is the messianic movement in Israel. When national religious and other Greater Israel supporters attributed the victory of the Six-Day War in 1967 to a miracle, a divine intervention, Israeli liberal democrats rejected this explanation, while other, more far-sighted Israelis regarded this tendency with concern for the future of democracy in Israel. Such concerns were confirmed by the rise of the Jewish messianic movement that would fuel the Israeli settlement in the occupied territories a few years later.

Thomas Hobbes, the founder of the modern political theory of the state, is also the very thinker who— as I previously mentioned— laid the grounds for modern individualism in politics, and combined his conception of the individual with the idea of a social contract based upon an agreement on the part of individuals to form an artificial man as a head of state. In his theory, which deeply influenced subsequent modern legal and political ideas, Hobbes amalgamates individualism with horizontal political inter-action to form a social contract that generates a bottom-up causality, in order to establish a super-governor, a source and cause of instrumental and, therefore, legitimate, top-bottom hierarchical actions. In other words, in Hobbes's theory, democratic causality prevails mainly in the formative stage of the constitution of the state.

In another move, consistent with the emerging dualistic cosmology that separates Nature and culture, Hobbes effectively juxtaposed the imaginary of Nature as the realm of necessity with the imaginary of politics as the domain of a human, voluntary individual choice of a representative agent. The fiction of the social contract lies in the attempt to enlist the contemporary legal language in order to envision how people might extricate themselves from the chains of necessity and take up the revolutionary step of moving into the realm of freedom—the legal use of power. According to Hobbes, this open, risky, formative political moment, is but short-lived. It may actually be no more than a moment in a collective imagination of the constitution of the polity.

Following the creation of the sovereign, freedom merely becomes the internalization of the sense that obedience to the laws of the state derives from the constitutive political moment that renders the obedient citizen a consenting latent partner to the restrictions of the political order. These restrictions preserve the citizens' right to annul their consent when the state fails to fulfil its most important contractual obligation to assure their security. In an existing and reasonably stable democracy, that political moment becomes unlimited in time.

Democracy is a system that generates procedures and institutions such as elections, parliaments and free press, aimed at ensuring a perpetual political formation and reformation, a partly ritualistic participation and influence on the operation of the elected government and the length of its stay on stage.[[103]](#footnote-103) Political influence and legitimation simultaneously flow laterally (among representatives and citizens) and vertically from the bottom up. It is a dynamic political system that in no way can be thought of or treated as a given. Always in a flow of making, remaking and unmaking, democratic politics is continually oriented to functioning with its face to the present and the near future.

In order for a system of voluntary politics to be viable, it requires not only a recognition that individuals are autonomous, but also the acknowledgement that by interacting with other individuals they can anticipate and influence them. In other words, voluntary democratic politics rests on the capacity of a multitude of individuals to interact in such a way that their discrete behavior is somehow imagined as an aggregate that becomes a collective cause of a particular government. But in order to reach a state whereby politics is carried out by a horizontal and upward vertical causality which cuts across a multiplicity of voluntary individuals, very important and serious obstacles must be overcome. Historically, a most significant one is the necessity to eliminate entrenched hierarchical superhuman or human command and power structures that are neither formally nor substantially dependent upon the people. In many respects, this desideratum corresponded to the process of secularization and to the increasing unacceptability of the "divine right of kings"—to the dethroning of both God and king as agents in the actual political world.

This move has not actually taken place in many non-Western regions. According to Islam, for instance, a holistic imaginary of the cosmos encompasses all beings and—if you exclude traditional or self-appointed agents of God—it leaves no space for autonomous human enterprise. This cosmological vision, developed by medieval Islam, cannot, of course, account for the diverse practices of human affairs in Islamic societies then and now. But the impact of the mosque, of the Sharia, of popular religion and Islamic cosmology on the politics of Islamic states cannot be ignored.

It is useful to juxtapose modern Western imaginaries of horizontal political causality with the observation of Seyyed Hussein Nasr that in the dominant Sunni school of Ash'arite theology, the absolute transcendence of God vis-à-vis the world and humanity and the "'infinite' gulf separating [them] is emphasized to such a degree thatthe individual nature of things, as well as Nature as a distinct domain of reality, melts away by the absolute power of the Creator. 'Horizontal' causality is denied."[[104]](#footnote-104) In such a system, God is the cause of all things, both physical and human.

This was not, of course, the only medieval theology of Islam, and over time it certainly has undergone changes.[[105]](#footnote-105) There is little doubt, however, that it has left a discernable legacy in modern Islamic states and politics. Despite a measure of anachronism, the juxtaposition of the largely persistent Islamic cosmology with the Nature/Culture, or world/Man divide in modern Western cosmology underscores the support that the dualistic Western cosmology has lent, in the modern West, to the emergence of horizontal and upward political causality in both the material-physical and the human (including political) worlds.

In a very instructive book entitled *Freedom in the Arab World: Concepts and Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Wael Abu-Uksa has closely examined trends of modernization infiltrating into the Arab political language throughout the nineteenth century. He argues that despite the translations of Western political texts imported into Arab political discourse, such concepts as sovereignty, freedom, rights, equality, republicanism and democracy were modified in translation to fit fundamental religious and traditional conventions. For some Arab writers, for instance, freedom was largely confined to acting according to the law. Individual rights were not considered an inalienable gift of Nature, but a privilege endowed by the ruler to his subjects, and popular sovereignty was generally decisively ruled out as a potential source of instability, even anarchy.[[106]](#footnote-106) Horizontal and upward vertical channels of political influence could not flourish within such imaginaries and mental frameworks. By contrast, however, some liberal notions of personal, nonpolitical freedom are discernable in nineteenth-century Arab discourse. Despite the persistent impact of religion and authoritarian conventions, the revolutionary fever that swept most of the Arab countries during the 2011 Arab Spring has been influenced, among other factors, by nineteenth-century partially successful attempts to modernize Arab Muslim political discourse.[[107]](#footnote-107) It demonstrated both an intense revolutionary horizontal political interaction aimed at toppling hierarchical authority and creating more just societies and democratic governments.

The failure of these Arab uprisings after a short time indicates that a transformation of popular political consciousness and the willingness to act and interact fall short of the mark if not accompanied by the slow gradual development of modern political institutional capacities. The intense horizontal political interaction of the protestors has basically proved more successful, at least temporarily, in provisionally delegitimizing hierarchical power structures and dictatorship, but has failed to generate a bottom-up vertical flow of legitimation for non-autocratic institutionalized governments. Still, the revolution that took place in the consciousness of masses of Muslim Arabs suggests that the unfinished Arab revolutions may write another chapter in the future.

Obviously, both horizontal and bottom-up political causations are democratic ideals whose actual practice and institutionalization are fraught with many difficulties. Once a political imaginary has taken hold in a society and evolved, these ideals of democratic causation, this democratic imaginary can persistently erode the legitimation of undemocratic power structures. Its realization, nevertheless, depends upon a host of additional social and cultural norms and practices.

Also in the West, in order to become a building-block of voluntary democratic politics, bottom-up causality has had to be emancipated from a deep-seated suspicion in power holders, including those democratically elected. Horizontal political causality, often institutionalized as parties and other voluntary political associations, has traditionally required a degree of trust in other individuals and groups. Distrust of power holders has stemmed from several reasons. The most important one is the legacy of church and monarchic hierarchies, which were toppled by modern revolutions in the West. Another cause has, undoubtedly, been associated with the often sudden transition from a rule of super-human divine agencies and feared kings to one under ordinary human beings.

This transition has been constrained also by the difficulties inherent in fathoming other persons' motives, in having any access to individual human interior worlds and interests. In a landmark study of a town in Southern Italy, American political scientist Edward Banfield found out that the citizens of that town uniformly took it for granted that the promises and high-flouted rhetoric of their elected city leaders were just a cover for a wide systematic theft of public funds for personal benefits. In their view, a reshuffle in the town leadership would amount to a mere switch between competing groups of thieves. Due to this radical privatization of public money and power, Banfield concludes, such towns actually lack a public sphere.[[108]](#footnote-108) It obviously would take a series of significant changes and socio-cultural developments in order for such corrupt political culture to be sufficiently transformed to host a democratic regime.

In his study of Renaissance humanism, Walter Ullmann notes that the constraints on lay trust in public servants originated with the gradual discovery of the subjective dimension of human innerness. This realization, in fact, exposed and accentuated the tensions between the subjective and objective dimensions of political action: "Precisely because virtually all medieval public life rested on the distinction between the office and the personality of the office holder, the objective norms held sway and had great success. The concentration on the humanity of man…on his personal features gradually undermined these objective standards."[[109]](#footnote-109)

In contemporary America, this problem has been compounded by political results brought about through the interaction of many culturally, religiously and ethnically diverse individuals, thus literally inhibiting precise attributions of motives, causes and results. In the American democracy, the difficulty of knowing other people was largely overcome, nevertheless, by a culture of assumed interpersonal transparency; a culture that—unlike its continental counterpart, does not disassociate the inner private person from the external behavioral dimension and appearance of the social individual.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Obviously, the tendency to distrust governors may assume various forms in different times and contexts and depends upon particular local culture and social norms. James Young already noted an early eighteenth-century American tendency to regard any political power as evil and inherently corrupt. Even "the power holders, in their own outlook, did not escape a culturally ingrained predisposition to view political power and politics as essentially evil."[[111]](#footnote-111) Such antipower attitudes relate to the inherent contradiction between the practicality of democratic leadership and principles of self-government. Commenting on the Washingtonian community between 1800 and 1828, Young notes that "antipower attitudes and conspiracy theories of politics have persisted in America well into the first decades of the nineteenth century."[[112]](#footnote-112)

Combined with the necessity for leadership, such inherent distrust, and even hostility toward leadership in democracy, has functioned throughout American political history as an engine of political criticism, resistance and change. This interplay of some measure of a practically necessary political hierarchy of elected officials and political resistance, motivated by the norm of participatory politics, has constituted a structural check on the danger of relapsing into authoritarianism or anarchy.

The political record in early America and other democracies, whereby individuals and small groups could influence the political process and its results, shows how antipolitical attitudes often generate socially pervasive destabilizing political conspiracy theories. One of the most dramatic cases in the twentieth century was, of course, McCarthyism's "witch-hunt," and a later one— the 2016 election campaign, in which the Republican candidate Donald Trump massively geared conspiracy theories to debunk the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, exploiting anti-power feelings toward her as former senator and secretary of state, as well as toward her husband, former president Bill Clinton.

Such theories and their influence on political behavior clearly disrupt the trust necessary for the emergence of legitimate and legitimating bottom-up and horizontal democratic political causalities. In an article about early American democracy aptly entitled "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century,"[[113]](#footnote-113) Gordon Wood duly rejects the tendency of some historians to interpret the phenomenon in pathological psychological terms, as consisting of paranoia cases.[[114]](#footnote-114) He suggests that conspiracy theories constitute attempts to account for the causes of events "entirely [by reference] to individual intentions or motives." Paradoxically, this democratic "pathology" assumes exactly what is required to enable democratic causality in human affairs: attributions of causal and, therefore, moral responsibility to agents, based on the assumption that the world consists, in Wood's words, "of autonomous, freely acting individuals who are capable of directly and deliberately bringing about events through their decisions and actions."[[115]](#footnote-115) Again, in the context of social distrust, such perception may easily deteriorate into conspiracy theories. Wood maintains that "these assumptions still permeate our culture," although he carefully warns that we seldom are aware of the profound changes that have taken place since the eighteenth century, following the increasing social and political trust in the relations between the intentions of actors and the visible results of their actions, partly due to the rise of the social sciences and their influence around the mid-nineteenth century.[[116]](#footnote-116)

The point is that conspiracy theories entail, in some sense, an unconscious abuse of democratic premises of political action, as well as natural cognitive-psychological responses to dramatic gaps between actors' internal invisible motives, manifest intentions and the perceived results of their actions. Such gaps may, indeed, be deliberate, yet mostly reflect the many contingent factors that intervene and disrupt a clear path from intentions to effects.

Another type of an overall unintended abuse of the democratic theory of voluntary action that has underlined horizontal political causation and has acquired the power to account for, and even legitimate perceived gaps between actors' intentions and results, consists in the imaginary of mechanism. This imaginary renders the actions of multiple actors a quasi-automatic system, sometimes of self-regulation, whose results are usually remote from the intentions of the individuals who comprise it. This gap has been usually justified as both a necessary consequence of impersonal mechanical process and as a public good.

Given the loss, in the secular age, of the reliability of divine harmonization of multiple individual behaviors and their consolidation into public goods, such as self-preservation and stability, and given the formidable difficulties entailed in realizing a stable democratic government by means of horizontal political interaction on the part of free individuals, the temptation of spontaneous self-regulating social mechanism, guided by an "invisible hand," has become, during the eighteenth century, widely irresistible.[[117]](#footnote-117) Like other secularized versions of theological categories and religious metaphysics, such as the inherent morality of "natural law" or the hierarchy of beings,[[118]](#footnote-118) this imaginary of nearly automatic self-regulation became a very plausible escape from the challenges induced by democratic revolutions and their commitment to freedom and democratic political causalities.

The mechanical model relieved also the pains inherent in assuming political responsibility for uneven governmental allocations of scarce resources. Rather than voluntary mutual accommodations, adjustments, and painful compromises reached by individuals interacting and negotiating within the framework of an imaginary contractual polity, mechanical self-regulation aimed to achieve all those benefits by way of a fiat. The apparent, albeit unsubstantial closeness between impersonal mechanisms of self-regulation and democratic or republican forms of self-government, as well as their adoption as arguments or rationales against government elites and bureaucracy, has sometimes goaded their confusion.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Ultimately, self-regulation undermines the dignity and civic orientation of democratic individuals, as stressed, for example, by Thomas Paine. Paine, the great defender of American independence against the British monarchy, lent to the power and the imagination of the individual too great a weight to accept automatic or impersonal self-regulation as a principle of government. In his famous *Rights of Man (*1791), he observed that "there can be but one element of human power; and that element is man himself. Monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, are but creatures of [the] imagination."[[120]](#footnote-120) Obviously, Paine, a Republican who celebrated the French Revolution, could not endorse a non-participatory regime. Favoring the impersonal course of history, Edmund Burke, conversely, advanced a nondemocratic theory of action as an alternative to conscious voluntary horizontal political interaction. Unlike Paine, he was reluctant to acknowledge the capacity of individuals to think, reason, adjust, and direct their actions with a degree of regard and commitment to common general public interest. By contrast, the emphasis on cooperative human effort was clearly endorsed by Paine's extremely optimistic view of human Nature, based upon his premise on the compatibility between individualism, the human capacity for perfectibility and the perception of the public interest, which enabled the individual to be mindful of both himself and the public interest.[[121]](#footnote-121)

Furthermore, relying on the reciprocal adaptation and accommodation of diverse individuals, Paine seeks, indeed, to attenuate the role of government but, by no means, to dispense with it altogether. Government, to be sure, is "a necessary evil." Nevertheless, it bears the vital purpose "to supply the few cases to which society and civilization are not conveniently competent."[[122]](#footnote-122) Comparing new with old systems of government, Paine maintains, firstly, that unlike former ones, the power delegated to a new government administration is meant to serve "the common benefit of society." Precisely due to his rejection of self-regulation theories based upon behavior as guided by narrow self-interest, he deems it an important role of government to advance "a system of peace, as the true meaning of enriching a nation… [and to promote a] universal society, as a means of universal commerce."[[123]](#footnote-123)

In other contexts, commerce could be considered integral to market self-regulation, but in the case of Paine, who valued the educational role of the government in inculcating republican orientations among the citizens, reciprocal commerce appeared less mechanistic. More importantly, whereas Adam Smith's idea of the "invisible hand" was said to guarantee the harmony and the public goodness of the effects of unguided horizontal interaction of multiple selfish egotistic individuals, according to Paine, participatory public- oriented horizontal causality—through the interaction of equals— actually becomes the cause and the condition for the *political*, rather than the natural legitimation of the results, whatever they might be.

This raises the possibility that the public interest will not be identified so much with a particular content which unrealistically appears to satisfy all individual citizens, but with the *legitimized procedure* of free individual interaction that creates the content. In retrospect, the record of the results of the "naturalized" market mechanism, in serving democratic equality and the public interest, is dismal enough to question its advantages as a regulator of liberal capitalistic economy and, even more, as a model for desirable self-regulation in politics.

In addition to the automatic self-adjustment of numerous individual interests and actions, horizontal liberal-democratic forms of legitimate political action were resisted also by advocates of the idea that society is not formed by a contract but by impulse, instinct and tradition. Charles Lloyd, a late eighteenth-century poet and a friend of Coleridge, maintained that society is not formed by people entering into a contract but "from an inevitable impulse, with a safe yet blind instinct [guided by] the immutable laws of the universe"—a clearly undemocratic naturalistic analogy.[[124]](#footnote-124) Such attitudes were obviously supported by the trust placed in an impersonal self-adjusting collective vis-à-vis the waning faith in the wisdom of the individual. Sheehan and Wahrman appropriately quote, in this connection, Edmund Burke's observation, uttered before the assembly of British legislators in 1782 that "the individual is foolish; the multitude, for the moment is foolish…but the species is wise."[[125]](#footnote-125) The accumulation in historical time of invisible human actions was perfectly compatible with Burke's rejection of oriented liberal democratic individualism at the time.

It is also difficult to protect voluntary horizontal democratic forms of action from democratic governments seeking stability and control by limiting the frequency of elections, imposing harsh strictures on eligibility for citizenship, censoring the media, controlling the themes and contents of education and protectively institutionalizing the current power structure. All democratic governments are haunted by the inherent constraints to aggregate citizens' preferences to generate a legitimate mandate for the direction of public policy. Together with the notorious elusiveness of public opinion, the interpretation of the public interest and the public will has actually become a free hunting field for politicians and journalists. Their general aim has usually been to render what in a democracy is an inherently ambiguous, temporary and conditional power, into a clear, solid, even permanent state of affairs. Actually, were anarchy compatible with a framework that would ensure and channel the influence of the continual political choices of the many with a consideration for the few, it would constitute, in a sense, a perfect democracy. Since this condition is scarcely realizable, the very institutionalization of democracy both stabilizes and limits its full embodiment.

The record shows that in a free society, elected officials can discern and accurately enough intuit the goals which the public would not resist or even agree to: accessible low-price food, personal security, reasonable health services, employment, fair taxes, good, attainable education, public transportation and supply of clothes, utilities and the like. These are mostly self-evident universal public goods that almost do not need confirmation by specifically articulated public attitudes. They often appear as the requirements of natural self-preservation. Still, scarcity of resources and the need to set up priorities require hard choices on the part of a public authority.

The idea of democracy is, to sum up, both the most compelling ideal of legitimate power and the least practical regime. Every democracy lives problematically and fragilely on the axis between anarchy and authoritarianism and is subject to their opposing pressures and temptations. Contrary to the common view of politics as a power play, politics, in the sense I refer to here, is not a signifier of a power-struggle between grossly unequal individuals and groups in nonpolitical associations, such as a monarchic court, business firm or a trade union. There is no politics in the above sense—only a power play, in a monarchy, a business corporation, trade union, a bureaucratic organization or in the family. Politics, in the view I promote here, is a voluntary participatory process of sustaining and navigating collective life within the democratic polity.

Surely the requirements for politics as a feature of democracy are rarely fulfilled even in advanced democracies. Even in societies committed to democratic values and procedures which strive to approximate its ideals, the impracticality of self-government always curtails their achievement. Still, despite such necessarily partial achievements, the driving force of democracy as the only idea of the legitimate regime in our time renders it a constructive utopia, a utopia whose compelling power on the minds of people generates modes of behavior that strive to approximate it.[[126]](#footnote-126) Nevertheless, as I previously indicated, when the gaps between the expectations that actions or procedures that correspond to horizontal political and bottom-up political causality of the kind that legitimate democracy are grossly abused or violated, democracy is unsustainable.

In a democracy, the only acceptable hierarchy is that which is temporary, rotating and dependent partly upon governmental responses to substantial and dynamic public expressions of needs, desires and individual or group interests from below.[[127]](#footnote-127) It is a hierarchy that emerges from the logical necessity of collective action, especially in critical times. As such, it is necessarily an unstable and often an ineffective hierarchy. Such is the condition of a regime that would place freedom above efficacy, efficiency and governability. But, in fact, all democratic governments seek to legitimate governability, stability and instrumental success by means that are deliberately or not visibly detrimental to democratically legitimate forms of action and freedoms.

Despite the diverse obstacles inherent in horizontal and bottom-up forms of democratic political causality, the tendency to relapse into a political hierarchy or cultivate the myth of an automatic natural self-regulation, or obfuscate political interaction and cooperation by conspiracy theories, the epistemology and norms of democratic causality have still persisted as conditions and measures of legitimate political action and authority.

Another necessary epistemological category of democratic politics and culture is the "public fact," which constitutes a necessary basis for judging and criticizing democratic governments, a political weapon of governments and oppositions. Like bottom-up vertical and horizontal democratic causalities, the public fact, to which we shall turn in the following, is a vital, albeit fragile element in the epistemological constitution of modern democracy.

**Chapter 6**

**Public Facts as Political Currency**

Scientists, philosophers and historians of science agree that in science, "facts" are facts only within the framework of theories. In politics, "facts" are facts only within the epistemological conventions of "common sense."[[128]](#footnote-128) Hence, unlike scientific facts, political ones must become public in order to enjoy the status of facts. Still, it is impossible to exaggerate the impact, the metaphoric deployment and the wide perceptions of hard-objective scientific facts on the formation of categories and imaginaries of facts in politics and the social sciences. Clearly, the unique modern cosmological dichotomy of Nature and Culture, of the imaginary of the world of Nature as an object separate and external to human beings, has played a crucial role in the very emergence of modern categories of objective social, economic and political facts that, at least in the West, have come to constitute human reality.

As the underlying basis of the modern regimes of science, technology, ethics and politics, the cognitive, normative, metaphorical and institutional investments in these diverse derivatives of cosmological dualism have been sufficiently heavy to back up the public fact, analogous to the physical counterpart, as a major resource in democratic political discourse and action. It should be emphasized, that the image of and metaphorical reference to physics as a paradigmatic source and example of "hard facts" reflects the popular impact of anachronistic Newtonian physics, rather than that of post-Einsteinian physics or quantum mechanics.

Contemporary physics has not yet been assimilated into popular common sense. As the epistemological arena of democratic politics, common sense has functioned as a gatekeeper, preventing the entrance of notions and claims that might induce confusion and appear inaccessible to the common man as hard facts. That, actually, was the reason why Henri Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty asked Einstein to reconcile his theoretical concept of time which—given Einstein's enormous authority—unsettles man's confidence in the ordinary concept of reality, with the common notion regulating human interaction.[[129]](#footnote-129) If anything, contemporary physics has been influencing science fiction and postmodern conceptions of space and time in contemporary literature, poetry and architecture. Given the historicity of common sense, it was expected that, at least, some elements of the legacy of the popular version of Einsteinism would be modified in time and become eligible to pass the guardians of common sense.[[130]](#footnote-130)

The perception of Nature as a solid object and as a system of reliable, repetitious regularities, stood, indeed, in contrast to the perception of politics and morals as unstable and irregular. This contrast lent the imaginary of solid Nature colossal power as a metaphor, analogy or ideal for the political and the moral universe. Kant not only alluded to the nature analogy to reinforce his categorical imperative; he sought, moreover, to anchor his moral theory in the universal objective imaginary of Nature in his time, by requiring that all maxims of action "have a form, which consists in universality… [and] be chosen as though they should hold as universal laws of nature… [and] ought to harmonize with a possible realm of ends as with a realm of nature."[[131]](#footnote-131)

Kant’s uses of the imaginary of Nature has inspired diverse attempts to define human decisions and actions as objective and necessary. As we shall see in Part III of the present book, it led also to ingenious attempts to integrate Nature into the political arena, often at the expense of the poltical, by proxies such as science, technology and economics.

Perhaps the most important latent function of Nature and "natural facts" in democratic politics lies in their deployment as counterparts to "social facts," as neutral references for anchoring political arguments and actions, and sometimes tempering political conflicts. Considering their inherent fragility, it is intriguing to note the powers conferred upon social and political facts to expose myths, political deceptions and false claims to neutrality. The "naked truth," representing hard reality in the political context, was wrongly regarded, for a long time, as a sufficient constraint on subjective behavior and on arbitrary power. It was assumed that self-evident facts can end disputes and yield political consensus.

Despite such illusions, the demands for the democratic decentralization of power required something such as hard facts to arm citizens against abuses of power and against the constant attempts of power to distribute partial self-serving images of reality. Drawing on Hobbes’ observation that "words" are the "counters of wise men and the money of fools," I would argue, in a more positive tune, that facts are both the counters and the money of democratic citizens.[[132]](#footnote-132) In order to fulfil that role, facts must appear reliable and widely accessible references which often depend upon their materiality and visibility. They should be perceived also as self-evident or, at least, plausible and simple enough to laypeople, not requiring complicated interpretation. They also must appear stable. We may say, that the category or, better still, the imaginary of "objective facts" is an integral component—to borrow an expression by Wittgenstein—of democratic "forms of life." We are concerned here with how categories of "objective facts" are made and enter democratic forms of life and why they are important in democratic politics.

As we shall see, in contradistinction to texts, facts, as they appear in the context of modern common sense, were for a long time supposed to be public and hence, to decentralize the authority to make reality claims.[[133]](#footnote-133)

What are the conditions that render facts the political capital of citizens in a democratic polity? What empowers claims of factual reality to stand against misrepresentations, myths, lies, subjective fantasies, deception, and mere opinion? How can laypeople resist the attempts to accept myths and fantasies as facts? These questions are very difficult to answer. It is evident that what makes claims of factuality effective in social and political interaction is a host of features that generate trust. As we shall see later in this book, the disappearance of these features, dramatized in the era of Donald Trump's presidency, has become, perhaps, the most serious challenge to the very democracy we have been trained to imagine and often experience in our time. In other words, we are talking about "the fact" as the principal basis of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy.

So how is fact made factual, an objective fact, in modern democratic societies, especially in Western countries? I cannot do much better than examine a number of obvious and less-obvious factors. Perhaps the most evident one is the condition that enables citizens to perceive claimed facts as public. We can think of several things associated with the attribute of being public. One is the presence of a space which is socially shared, in contrast to a private group space or to individual subjective interiority, which is the residence of private thoughts and individual conscience. Such public space is not a universal but intra-social local political phenomenon, and is, in itself, a modern informal institution.[[134]](#footnote-134) Public space is the arena in which events such as an explosion in a coal mine, a report on the fragile foundations of a bridge, risky water pollution, and internal reports on inhuman conditions in state prisons can become public facts and events, often when sanctioned by the social authority of experts.

Physically visible events can easily enter the domain of facts, although the question of what were the causes of such events may be hidden or ambiguous. Early modern experimental scientists such as Robert Boyle attempted to validate their claims by selectively opening their experiments to a limited but "reliable" public.[[135]](#footnote-135) This was an important beginning of the use of a public to validate scientific claims. To go further and validate also causes of events or other public processes, public facts have required, however, several additional more demanding conditions. Within scientific forums, methodology and theory have constituted such crucial factors.

Beyond the inner forums of science, in the public space, numbers, charts and other forms of quantification had, for long, assumed special rhetorical powers on a more superficial basis. For a long time, the rhetorical power of numbers had not been challenged by an awareness of the invisible methodologies, choices and interests that may be concealed behind surface technical appearance of quantitative statistical measures. These rhetorical powers have related to the impact of modern scientific culture on the reliability of claims to factuality in the public domain. The apparent impersonality of the uses of numbers to depict states of affairs such as rates of inflation, birth and mortality rates, or probable risks of alcohol consumption, generated trust. Ted Porter has shown that the "plain" language of numbers spoken by natural scientists— a language which was supposed, for a long time, to be immune from corruption by subjective bias, interest or hidden values—was gradually extended to include the fields of engineering and the social sciences, as well as public social and political discourses. Porter's analysis is most revealing in that he is able to show the ways whereby numbers have been used to deny discretion and create the impression of technical necessity. Moreover, since the 1940s, the application of statistical tests in various areas of medical research could be more adequately explained, in Porter's view, as a means to enhance the trust of outsiders than as internal aids for thinking and analysis.

This is more than dropping a hint that politicians and clerks have learned to use numbers and statistical reports in order to cultivate "virtual objectivity" and "virtual knowledge", which also assist in the creation of virtual transparency and virtual accountability. The psycho-perceptual process that underlies virtual objectivity is actually part of the generation and deployment of trust in the modern democratic society, detached, as such, from the stricter scientific requirements of trustworthiness. It is, therefore, more easily deployable. We will return to these observations later, when we discuss the erosion of the modern constitutional-epistemological regime of democracy.[[136]](#footnote-136)

Next to the important trust in numbers, an important support for public trust in "facts" derives from a series of institutions that make for the definition of various domains of factual reality. In modern democracy, institutions such as the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), The Bureau of Standards (BS), departments of government statistics, universities, printed and electronic- media news were able to produce largely credible definitions of facts for general currency. (Many Americans recall, with deep nostalgia, the sense of shared reality which Walter Cronkite, the anchorman of CBS News, decades ago, projected at the end of the evening newscast, when he said "this is the world tonight," in blatant contradistinction to the current chaos, generated, among other things, by “fake news”).

Congenial to the authority of such institutions were the relatively successful records of reliability, backed up by the authority of scientists and other professionals who scrupulously adhered to versions of detached scientific accounts of investigations and research results.

For a considerable length of time, modern trust in claims of factual reality on the part of the above institutions was supported by particular forms of language use, discernable already in attempts to elicit trust by early natural scientists (Boyle, Priestley and Faraday and, with particular relevance to politics, John Locke), who sharply separated the language of reference to Nature and its laws from moral and political languages.[[137]](#footnote-137) This style of scientific discourse, however, often concealed links of science to its own history and to the shifting human imagination. The disavowal of the awareness that science is a human enterprise buttressed by the depiction of Nature as the given phenomena of the physical world, independent of the human imagination, has conferred upon scientific factual assertions or claims the status of objective-non-human descriptions of reality. A layperson perception of such definitions of factual reality— lacking awareness of the economic, political and normative elements that entered their composition—has rendered them enormously effective for promoting cooperation and regulation in human affairs. As we shall see in the following, their sustainability was later undermined by a profound erosion of the epistemological norms and habits of cultures of knowledge in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. One important development in this direction took place in the scholarly account of changes in the structure of knowledge.

This is why, from this perspective, the enormously influential argument advanced by Princeton physicist and historian of science Thomas Kuhn—in his influential *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962)—that scientific knowledge production involves historical shifts between paradigms, appeared to negate the autonomy of both Nature and science, setting a tremor high in the cultural "Richter scale" of the conventional imaginary of modern science as a linear cumulative process. Quite a few historians of science, culture, and politics have regarded the ripple effects of Kuhn's book an important turning point in the status of facts in the natural as well as the social sciences, and, by implication, in politics.[[138]](#footnote-138) In other words, it has—as we shall see in the last part of the book— weakened trust in claims of objective external facts as the anchor of modern common sense and in "objectification" as a strategy of protecting the apolitical authority of experts and of depoliticizing political actions.

**Chapter 7**

**The Visibility and Accountability of Political Power**

I have explored extensively, in my former books, the development of the visual culture of modern democracy and, particularly, the impact of the scientific revolution upon the redemption of the human eye from its lower medieval status as a reliable source of knowledge. I have attempted to show how the development of disciplined systematic scientific observations gave rise to and sanctioned, by means of metaphor and analogy, less-disciplined, if reliable common-sense layperson observations on the world, society and politics.[[139]](#footnote-139) The works I have hitherto published will allow me, in this chapter, to be more succinct and focus on a different, yet closely related aspect of the visual culture of modern democracy—the crucial place of *visibility* as a major element in the modern constitution of democratic epistemology. This element works in tandem with voluntary individualism, democratic political causalities, the imaginary of the physical and political worlds as consisting of public facts and the perceptual categories of objects and objectivity (the epistemological categories that are radically eroding in our time).

Within this framework, perhaps the main effect of vision in democracy consisted in its objectification of politics as a series of observable public statements, actions, events and policies enabling democratic citizens to be politically informed, judge their rulers and partake in the political process. As Werner Heisenberg observed in his *Physics and Philosophy*, “in the drama of existence we are ourselves both players and spectators."[[140]](#footnote-140) Given the other elements of democratic epistemology, the modern emergence of a reliable layperson gaze has been necessary to link individuals among themselves and to groups, and was congenial to the emergence of perceptions of horizontal and bottom-up political causality— the role of the category of visible public facts as political currency essential for government criticism and accountability. Such layperson gaze also played a crucial role in rendering the modern state—by means of the supposed visibility of its governors, policemen, rituals, and institutions—an ongoing spectacle.[[141]](#footnote-141) This approach was, for a while, buttressed by the seventeenth and eighteen-century legacy of conceiving "reality" as independent and separate from culture, as a safe referent "uncontaminated" by human value or perceptual biases. This democratic gaze, which has been instrumental for the objectification of "reality," as well as the state and the exercise of governmental power has, of course, consisted largely in a mere useful illusion.

The common layperson habit of identifying observables with the real has been one of the central serviceable epistemological prejudices of modern democracy. It was most dramatically manifested in the central role of surfaces or externalities as manifestations of interiorities and identities in human and political interactions in America. It would be lost, of course, later, when "reality" could no longer be unproblematically perceived as unmediated by particular cultural and human perspectives. Nevertheless, as long as it persisted in modern common sense, it has fostered in democratic citizens the sense of knowing enough to develop the feeling of participation in the democratic process. It has supported democratic citizens’ largely unwarranted confidence in their own capacity to navigate themselves in the complexities of the political world.

It is paradoxical that these unwarranted beliefs, generated by both governments and laypeople, have largely corresponded to democratic norms and principles. The point is that to the extent to which the epistemological constitution of modern democracy sustained the beliefs and fictions that were necessary to imagine and make democratic practices possible, it is their collapse—regardless of their initial illusionary status—that has been leading to the erosion of the partly successful attempts to approximate and institutionalize its principles and values. Such processes remind us that institutionalization is always driven by beliefs and interests rather than by necessary social or historical "laws."

In the *Descent of Icarus*,I proposed a distinction between two modes of layperson gazing: one typical of subjects in monarchic governments; the other, of citizens in their democracies—a distinction between *celebratory* and *attentive* visual orientations. The former is the admiring adulatory observation of the glorified spectacle of kingship; the latter – the partly skeptical-inquisitive gaze at representative government. I shall later try to discern the tendency which has superseded prior attestive visual orientations of democratic citizens in contemporary decaying democracies.

Another crucial aspect of democratic visual culture lies in its inherent decentralization and diversity of individual and group visual perspectives and their frames. A decentralization that generates competing understandings and interpretations of political events and governmental actions yields often unresolvable political debates. It might, at rare moments, create a usually false sense of voluntary agreement on the part of a perceptual majority. By contrast, in typical monarchic or authoritarian systems, conditions are more congenial for public uniformity and adoration induced by fear, tradition, propaganda and compelling, aesthetically seductive, royal or state pageantry.

Recorded experience confirms that even in democracies such as the American, the English and the Israeli, large parts of the population are possessed by celebratory visual orientations towards a leader and political shows. In any democracy, usually nonurban population can tip the balance toward nationalist or other versions of a decaying democracy.[[142]](#footnote-142) Such developments may point to the cultural weakness of modern secular common sense sustained by a democratic epistemological culture in a given society. To go back to the argument unfolded in my book *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions,* "a democracy, like any other political regime, must be imagined and performed by multiple agencies in order to exist":[[143]](#footnote-143) Performance, the building of institutions and multiple behaviors consistent with a collective faith in a shared political imaginary are the conditions that bring it into existence. Had the democratic political imagination that has developed during many centuries remained a remote abstraction, democracy would never have come into existence.

Undoubtedly, the visible experience with the political arena has always comprised also the raw material of the political imagination. One of the most interesting and difficult questions from the perspective of political epistemology has addressed the relations between laypeople perception and imagination of political reality. To what extent have conceptions of the political been dependent upon visible perception? I will return to this question later when I explore the radical transformation of visual political culture in the contemporary cybernetics culture.

Admittedly, as I indicated above, the transition from imagining to performing democracy is fraught with gaps and obstacles. In the modern period, as this book argues, it took the shift from a monistic unified to a dualistic cosmology that wedges autonomous Nature from autonomous culture, as well as the delineation of a public domain based upon voluntary behavior and exercise of freedoms—distinct from the domain of natural necessity—to open the possibility of democratic political epistemology and modern common sense as the arena of politics.

These developments, however, were indispensable but insufficient conditions for the rise of democratic regimes. Their first impact was to delegitimize hierarchical political governments, and only then to facilitate the beginning of the *performance* of the modern political "script" of democracy. As Keith Thomas has shown, the cosmological and ontological shifts became dramatically manifest from the early seventeenth century, with the decline of magic and mysticism, the emergence of the mechanical picture of the world and the rise of modern science.[[144]](#footnote-144) The American and the French revolutions destroyed the old regimes in the above countries and undermined their sustainability in other Western societies. But the evolution of performative democracy still had to overcome vestiges of monarchic legacy, as well as unrealistic and naive imaginaries of democracy.

One potentially explosive move was, indeed, attaching to the volatile "entity" of *the people* the ultimate power of sovereignty. During a good part of modern political history, armies of constitutional jurists have worked on legal and institutional measures to contain, channel and divide the power of the volatile public in order to enable governability. As in Hobbes' social contract, the people were actually deprived of the capacity to actually exercise real power, while symbolically remaining a source of the legitimation of their representatives. Future revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would demonstrate the ability of the people to temporarily exercise its sovereign power directly and create precedents that could function as a deterrent that set political-psychological constraints on the performance of nondemocratic, as well as stable democratic governments.

Constitutional and bureaucratic constraints on the direct use of sovereign power by the people needed reinforcement to foreclose deterioration into anarchy. Here the Enlightenment movement came to rescue. The belief in the inherent human capacity for rationality has gradually encouraged the expectation that reason can both restrain and guide the content of political freedom, while relegating the expression of human passions and enthusiasm to the domains of religion and the arts. Further support came from the ethos and ideology of educational reforms that taught the young, in the spirit of Rousseau and the "object method" of Pestalozzi, how to observe and identify objects, and only later learn how to properly use words responsibly. From the stress on observation in Pestalozzi's school to empirical education in the sciences at academic institutions, disciplined observation became central to modern culture, inspiring projects of training the "people" —the sovereign— how to look "democratically", that is, how to observe accurately and attestively in order to furnish evidence.

The scientific revolution and the larger movement of the Enlightenment showed the way and helped build up confidence in the performance of democracy, in performing the imaginary and the epistemology of democracy, thus rendering democracy more of a reality through what Nelson Goodman called—and David Hume would have confirmed—"a habit of perception."[[145]](#footnote-145) Such habits of perception, crucial for the enactment of horizontal human communication and stable public discourse, depended upon a complex of norms, orientations, expectations and habits —partly coincidental, partly contrived—which joined to form a very fragile temporary configuration.

**Chapter 8**

**Objectivity as a Fictional Limit of the Political**

Like horizontal causality and public facts, the perception of *objectivity* is also integral to the epistemological constitution of modern democracy. In the following, we are interested in exploring the conditions for the perception of objectivity and, in later chapters, its uses and abuses as a source of authority. Evolving from the cosmological status of Nature as autonomous object and the conception of human beings as witnesses-observers of Nature, the norm of objectivity flourished with the emergence of the expectations that modern science was an accurate, unbiased account of "external" Nature. This argument was advanced already by the first historian of the Royal Society of London, Bishop Thomas Sprat, when he specified the norms of the society— one of the earliest and most influential learned societies in Europe (1667). Referring to members of the society, he observed that "there will be always many sincere witnesses standing by, whom self-love will not persuade to report falsely, nor heat of invention carry to swallow a deceit too soon; as having themselves no hand in the making of the Experiment but only in the *Inspection*"(emphasis in original).[[146]](#footnote-146)

Robert. K. Merton, a leading twentieth-century American sociologist of science, showed the persistence of these norms through our days, including what he specifically called "disinterestedness" —a personal virtue of the scientist committed to a systemic professional perspective and public testability of scientific claims institutionalized by effectual peer judgment.[[147]](#footnote-147) Merton's insight facilitates the assumption of a view of objectivity as a systemic norm that spilled over from the scientific community to society at large. In the context of public affairs, this condition, as other epistemological norms that wandered from science and permeated in somewhat vulgar forms into the culture of modern common sense, was less subject to the strictures of professional peers' control by methodological criteria and replication. In the public sphere, the attribute of objectivity attached to scientific claims had to be adjusted to extra-scientific norms and expectations, such as materiality and common visibility, as well as to a host of other social conditions. The perceived visibility of technological feats, such as the balloon flights that validated to the masses Lavoisier's theory of invisible gases[[148]](#footnote-148) and, much later, the “small step for man on the moon” that appeared consistent with some Newtonian expectations, are cases in point.

The struggle to maintain virtual objectivity as a political resource consisted of a host of factors, some of which have been discussed in the former chapter on the visibility and accountability of democratic political power. A very significant such factor is the attribution of externality to the status of the world and all its nonhuman inanimate objects vis-à-vis human beings. This property of what passes as object in common sense is greatly reinforced by the sense that, unto itself, the external also resists "human contamination" by subjective misrepresentations, interventions and manipulations. The phrase "hard facts" has often been employed to connote the properties of compelling, disinterested, objective representation of the external.[[149]](#footnote-149) As we shall see, externality in relation to human beings has had many supporting connotations of objectivity associated, metaphorically— beyond objects such as stones, stars and rivers—also to events and, most problematically, also to man-made machines.

In this later case, any presumed independence from machine-products may be induced by the failure to perceive the human behind the machine, as we shall see later. This absence is often deployed by the metaphor of self-regulating systems attributed by liberals to the "market mechanism" and even to the American dream or ideal of a constitution that functions "as a machine that would go of itself."[[150]](#footnote-150)

Industrialization in America, perceived as a drama of human triumph over Nature, glorified engineers as embodying the special reliability of objective technicality sanctioned by their moral restraint,[[151]](#footnote-151) integrity, and discipline. By introducing quasi-natural mechanical automation, engineers appeared to displace hard moral and political choices by quasi-necessary technical operations.[[152]](#footnote-152) Eventually, elements of the tendency to yield to the products of technology as a kind of frozen unhuman objects boosted both uncritical consumption and capitalism.

Science is an odd, very odd endeavor. It is a human enterprise that almost entirely derives its authority from Nature, perceived as external to mankind, and is carried out by a community of researchers who normally try to efface their personal contributions to the body of knowledge they produce. For centuries, consistently with the seventeenth-century norms initially specified by Thomas Sprat, and in a theoretically systematic way by Robert Merton three hundred years later, scientists have belittled their role in what currently is rather recognized as the making of scientific "Truths," in order to validate their claims to interpret Nature.

Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, who analyzed the strategies whereby seventeenth-century British scientist Robert Boyle was able to validate the authority of his claims, show how the making of his experimental failures public "was a key element of the experimentalist's 'modesty' as a powerful rhetorical strategy." So, for Boyle, the notion of 'unsuccessfulness' was a *positive* resource in validating the experimental program.[[153]](#footnote-153) It broadcasted the impersonal objectivity of the experimenter. Like Robert Boyle, two centuries later, another prominent experimentalist, Michael Faraday, cultivated the view that scientific knowledge is something produced and confirmed by acts of disinterested witnessing of objects, operations and effects. In his public lectures at The Royal Institute of London, Faraday presented his findings as self-evident facts learned "in the school of Nature." Upon studying the former's research notes, David Gooding was able to show the extent to which Faraday was belittling and even concealing his own decisions and operations in producing the results of his original work in the "School of Nature."[[154]](#footnote-154) Believable objectivity was promoted in the above cases by staged humility, as a way of depersonalizing experimental results.

Following the disastrous explosion of the space shuttle Challenger 2 (January 1986), a member of the investigation committee, the noted physicist Richard Feynman, clearly saw himself as representing the impersonal "voice" of objective Nature, when he criticized NASA's engineers for ignoring the evidence of physical constraints under the pressure to meet a budgetary deadline. He famously warned that "[f]or a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, *for Nature cannot be fooled"*(emphasis mine).[[155]](#footnote-155) In other words, in order to be objective, scientific or engineering judgments must adhere to Nature.

Despite the ostensibly modest self-depersonalization of personal scientific choices—often celebrated by Nobel Prize committees—scientists either know or intuit that their authority in the social, political and public policy contexts largely depends upon their ability and special efforts to appear objective and disinterested under the public gaze. The anomaly I wish to emphasize is that whereas science has been one of the most glorious achievements of modern Western culture— of human beings—its authority in the socio-political context is rooted beyond culture, in the imaginary of scientists as people skillful in representing natural facts, regularities and necessities.

The point of this section is to show how "Nature," in the cosmological dichotomy of the modern West, has found its way to enter politics, the summit of voluntary political "Culture"— the other wing of the dualistic cosmology—via the mediation of science. I reiterate that "science" basically refers in our discussion to natural science, to the study of natural phenomena, what modern Western dualistic cosmology has defined as the physical world external to human beings, including the human body. The fact that the individual is internally split between mind and body, soul and Nature, provides a further special perspective on the dialectical relations between science and politics. For now, I will discuss the macro dimensions of the dichotomy. The Nature/Culture opposition has entailed the imaginary of Nature as the realm of inexorable laws, as opposed to the domain of politics as the realm of voluntarism; the realm of necessity versus the realm of freedom; of the world external to man as opposed to the world of human interiority and its social and behavioral embodiments.

One of the most important implications of the collective Western imaginary of this split consisted, until recently, in the acceptance of the constraints imposed by Nature on human freedoms and choices. As manifested in the universal mortality of all living beings, even to this day, when modern science and technology have enabled humanity to transcend and manipulate Nature, its ultimate links with necessity and fate have remained largely unquestionable. This state of things has engendered the great temptation to employ science either to expand human freedom to the territory of nature, or to extend the realm of natural necessity into the realm of freedom in order to legitimate human choices and actions in the name of impersonal necessity. As in the case of natural law, which has been for long a means to induce—even force—agreement, the verdicts of science assumed a finality that must elicit compliance. This was largely achieved by the production of virtual objectivity as an attribute assigned by natural and social scientists to their recommendations and actions in the sociopolitical context of public affairs.

Even if natural scientists are subject to the strictest standards of objectivity on the part of their peers in professional forums, this objectivity and its authority is not transferable to the same scientists and their very claims in the public realm, whereby any theory or its application is bound to strengthen the arguments and interests of some social or political groups while harming others. Nevertheless, scientists and politicians who enlist their scientific authority as a resource in the political context, are both intensely engaged in defending their claims to objectivity, often construed, usually falsely, as equivalent to their being politically neutral. What they often ignore is that even if their motives are apolitical, the redistribution of the effects of their knowledge and authority as factors in political decisions and public policies are politically consequential.

We are not dealing here with sporadic episodes, but with a massive use of scientific knowledge and authority claims in order to legitimate governmental choices and induce agreement to controversial policies and actions. The strategy is to circumvent the political process—by dis-alerting the lay public to the hidden political and value choices inherent in the sociopolitical repercussions stemming from claims of scientific truth and applied science.

Like natural law and economic science, natural science was perfected in the modern democratic state as a means to eclipse potentially controversial latent value choices, to depoliticize political decisions and actions and remove them from the arena of political discourse and negotiations. No wonder that the modern state was tempted to resort to the authority of scientists, often ignoring their knowledge,[[156]](#footnote-156) as a political resource to gloss over politically controversial policies. Ironically, the mixture of the authority of science and the political power-play has been characterized as an aspect of modernization.

The point I wish to make here is neither that scientific knowledge is irrelevant to good public policy nor that it is used only as a cover-up for hidden politics. My intention is to point out the pervasive use of natural science and, even more so, of technology and social sciences such as economics, in order to silence controversy and conceal the impact of scientific knowledge and authority. These are surreptitiously used and deployed as political resources to promote particular social and political distributions of risks, opportunities, assets and the actual social ordering of values.

I would like to emphasize the two potentially compatible, but often contradictory aspects of objectifying public decisions in democracy: On the one hand, concealing the political aspects of the choices underlying claims to objectivity might diminish the freedom of citizens to recognize and politically intervene in preventing governmental policies that might be detrimental for them. On the other, in democracy, the inherent tendency to overpoliticize any decision, of unlimited politicization, may paralyze the government and forestall desirable, measured proportional sacrifice of the interests of some social groups to enable a significant gain for others.[[157]](#footnote-157) So, in the following, I do not intend to launch a sweeping attack against all uses of the strategy of objectification in the context of democratic politics. I will focus, nevertheless, on cases in which wholesale objectification produces untenable wholesale depoliticization.

With the demise of the Enlightenment and the subsequent crises in the grip of concepts such as "facts," "horizontal causality," "objectivity," and the more encompassing concept of "rationality" in public affairs, a more critical assessment of these norms and their explicit and implicit functions in the political culture of modern democracy has increasingly become more important and instructive. As I hope to clarify in the following, neither a sweeping endorsement of the very possibility and desirability of objectivity in public affairs, nor its uncritical sweeping negation, may accurately account for the central function of objectivity in the social epistemology of Enlightenment politics or its continued, albeit modified, role in the post-Enlightenment politics of our time. It is only when we understand how Enlightenment, democracy and, to some extent, its persistent legacy in our time, have enlisted the imaginary of external objective Nature to shape the norm of objectivity—in tandem with concepts of causality and the certainty of public facts as necessary terms of democratic political discourse and action—that we can appreciate the consequences of the near-collapse of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy and its consequences for the contemporary political order.

Under the auspices of the Enlightenment, the prospect of a successful implementation of law, economics, natural science and technology was able to narrow down the domain of overt politics and to supersede it with various versions of "objective natural or social facts," raising a host of questions about the Nature of politics as a voluntary enterprise:

Are the many references to versions of external Nature a reflection of the need to tame arbitrary political power by "external" nonhuman references? Does the dependency on the natural anchorage of natural law, natural rights as "gifts or imperatives of Nature," and of the market as a natural mechanism, constitute attempts to compensate for the disappearing authority of a vanishing "God of Nature"? For the inability of humanity to wean itself from nursing on the transcendental? Fearing the lonely total human responsibility for shaping and running common life? An urge for anchorage beyond unresolvable conflicts in human affairs? A desire to check personal arbitrary judgments or power? Or, perhaps, the need to reflect or integrate the two parts of the "foundational unconscious" cosmological dualism of the modern West? Be it as it may, the intriguing thing is the move of the "political" to work simultaneously, manifestly, and latently as both political and apolitical politics, exploiting these distinctions to enhance modes of rhetoric and action.

In some ways, the Western Nature/Culture dualism enables each wing of the dichotomy to evolve a critical perspective on the other. This might be particularly valuable for a democratic polity which resists any kind of monism. By contrast to those steeped in Western thinking, for example, the Azande (central-African people of mixed ethnic origins in the region of Congo and Sudan) apparently cannot problematize their foundational beliefs because they "have no other idiom in which to express their thoughts," as anthropologist Melvin Pollner put it.[[158]](#footnote-158) To reiterate, despite Western common sense, the modern cosmological imaginary of naturalist cosmology that sets apart the world as an object external to human beings is not acceptable in many other cultures, nor is it a universal truth. It is a local Western truth derived from its hegemonic collective foundational imaginary. It does not mean, of course, that physical or astronomical theories valid in Cambridge, Massachusetts, are not valid in Amazonia. Only that they are valid to Western and Western-educated persons everywhere, based upon their internalization of the Western Nature/Culture dichotomy, but nowhere to cosmological monists such as the Amazonian people, even in New York.

Melvin Pollner has aptly formulated the mind-boggling thought that "the 'thereness' of the world, this most obvious and unremarkable feature of mundane existence, is not empirically given but a prejudice."[[159]](#footnote-159) My only objection is to the word "prejudice." It is not a prejudice, but largely a functional local collective imaginary, misinterpreted by Western socio-political epistemology. At the same time, prompted by their capacity to reason outside or against local conventional common-sense views, Western scholars and intellectuals may often experience this antinomy between Nature and Culture ironically. They can, on the one hand, acknowledge that neither mere knowledge nor sweeping skepticism may uphold the political order better than conventionalized, culturally produced, imaginaries and their derivative conception of objective reality—the "thereness of the world." On the other hand, as demonstrated during the French and the American revolutions, the success of the intellectuals who led these revolutions had depended upon their ability to adjust to established conventional perceptions and rhetoric of premodern popular reality as starting points for the fashioning of the modern alternative.[[160]](#footnote-160)

Part III

THE DIALECTICS OF OBJECTIFICATION: LIMITING OVERT AND ENHANCING HIDDEN POLITICS

**Chapter 9**

**The Objectifying Gaze of Science and Technology in the Political Context**

As a contrived, conscious, trained or spontaneous strategy, the objectifying gaze of science has been transferred from its natural habitat into the contexts of society and political culture. Depending on the point of view, both the virtues or liabilities entailed in removing the moral, psychological and political dimensions of *what* is viewed and *how* it is viewed—effected through the workings of the scientific gaze, and of its less-disciplined version in common-sense—have always lent to things an aura of virtual objectivity. The objectifying gaze has trained people to associate objectivity with an eschewal of the human, economic, cultural, normative and aesthetic dimensions inherent in artificial and other types of solid objects.

The emergence of the world as an object, as a picture, in the words of Heidegger,[[161]](#footnote-161) and the corresponding rise of human beings as observing subjects-spectators, have opened up enormous possibilities, as well as triggered great risks and pathologies in modern society, culture, and politics. These include new sources of authority, norms of behavior, frames of judgment, means of resolving conflicts and, concomitantly, of destruction, pollution, exploitation, false claims of necessity, of determinism and fatalism. Elements of this modern ethos of objectivity—"the objectivist bias," that regards entities as external objects—has permeated also the social sciences and common discourse. Giovanni Sartori observed that social scientists have developed the habit "of perceiving socioeconomic phenomena as 'facts,' while considering political phenomena as 'artifacts.'"[[162]](#footnote-162) The objectifying gaze is, then, in some sense, usefully paradoxical, since it confers on technologies and man-made inanimate objects a certain externality in relation to human beings—despite the fact that such objects actually embody human values, perspectives, and actions.

Historically, this paradox of perception was clearly manifest in the field of landscape painting. Discussing Panofsky's insights in his history of perspectival representation, invented in the first half of the fifteenth century, Descola notes that the

"Objectification of the subjective" produces a twofold effect: it creates a distance between man and the world by making the autonomy of things depend upon man; and it systematizes and stabilizes the external universe even as it confers upon the subject absolute mastery over the organization of this newly conquered exteriority.[[163]](#footnote-163)

Especially during the early period of the industrial revolution, technological objects appeared singularly independent of man; firstly, by their capacity to move, and, secondly, as forms of applied physics—the supposed "representations" and "extensions" of "objective Nature." Very frequently, technological products, machines and constructions were viewed as wondrous objects, signs of progress in yoking the powers of objective Nature to animate machines harnessed to human purpose.[[164]](#footnote-164)

Natural and manmade objects have, of course, a significantly different epistemic status. Vico famously insisted that epistemologically—unlike (manmade) artifacts—objects of Nature are incomprehensible, lie beyond human grasp. The objective scientific and quasi-scientific gaze, by eclipsing the multiplicity of human choices and interests that shaped artificial objects, appearing to still embody the logic of nature, endowed them with a certain aura of inaccessibility, even mysteriousness, more comparable with Vico's objects of Nature. Whereas at the beginning, machines—as the sole products of applied physics mediated by ingenious physicists-engineers to serve human purposes—enjoyed that aura of objectivity, mostly since the mid-twentieth century, an increasing exposure of the multiple value choices and interests pulling the strings of these wondrous technological feats mitigated the initial sense of awe and often induced fear. More importantly, it led, around the 1960s, to "the technology assessment movement" which, in its various forms, subjected technologies to explicit, more public, economic, ethical, political, and aesthetic reassessments.[[165]](#footnote-165)

Modern poetry, literature and painting reflect the mixed feelings of fear and wonder elicited by machines taking the stage in modern culture. To discern some of the elements embedded in such attitudes and their political implications, we should probably point to the fact that, to begin with, the engineers who produced the early feats of technology, those who concocted and understood how machines work, were a relatively small, highly celebrated elite.[[166]](#footnote-166)

The common run of humanity, incognizant of where the work of God ends and the work of man begins, were left in an uncertainty that has fostered admiration and triggered anxieties: Admiration of that which the collaboration of human beings and Nature can create, and fear of the "ghost in the machine," as well as of the expected punishment for the hubris of men trying to play God.[[167]](#footnote-167) Insofar as invented vehicles such as trains, steam boats, and flying-machines were perceived, in some circles, as representing human's meddling with transcendent God-given Nature, human's ambition was often regarded as but a continuation of the punishable violation of the Edenic Covenant. Hence, these machines, endowed with movement, speed and noise, were met from the start with ambivalence.

What has changed over time are the two wings of this ambivalence. On a more basic psychological level, most salient in very young children, self-moving and noisy machines were and are perceived as animated organisms. The toy industry has, of course, been quick to exploit this tendency. When children grow up in a Western culture, the sense of wonder dissipates and is replaced by a curious exhilaration by the discovery of the trick. Still, I believe, an element of wonder over self-moving inanimate objects remains in all of us since Antiquity[[168]](#footnote-168) and is now often translated into entertainment. In the case of robots, the fascination and the entertainment have been often eclipsed by fear induced by a vision of diminished human control.

Most importantly, the massive historical disenchantment with and the late modern de-objectification of technology has been associated with the erosion of the modern epistemological constitution of Democracy, which had been grounded on the imaginary of Nature as the ultimate object, the "mother" of all objects.

Let’s look at this process in more detail. Descartes, and later Newton—despite his religiosity and vast theological work—are, perhaps, the most influential modern philosophers-scientists who conceptualized the foundations of the modern dualistic cosmology that enabled the objectifications of science, technology, as well as laid the groundwork for the authority of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy. The force of that objectification has concurred in key areas of socio-political human endeavor, including law, medicine and several social sciences. The social sciences— including economics, psychology and political science— attest to the massive presence of various modes of objectification, for all their costs and benefits.

For long, the human gaze had framed technology as a way of harnessing the logic and forces of Nature for the good of human purpose. As such, it appeared to deploy elements of natural necessity and determinism in the social context. Naturalizing legislated law and the market, respectively, appeared to replace voluntary rational compliance and adaptation to contrived economic laws by obedience to the command of and adaptation to necessity.

The modern secularized conception of Nature—metamorphosed into applied physics, technology—continued, of course, to be empowered by its historical roots in imaginaries of the Divine. Committed to the sake of humankind, science and technology seemed to amalgamate the transcendental aura of Nature with human ingenuity. As such, the human, social, ethical, or political fabric and effects of technology have, by and large, remained latent. This fact has, thus, rendered technology an invaluable economic and political resource for the modern state and business entrepreneurs as a means of disciplining human behavior, while circumventing explicit voluntary choices and ethical considerations.

The extent to which this state of affairs has opened up possibilities for both effective management and cruel human exploitation—that looked harmless at the time— is illustrated in the wretched life of the young poverty-stricken girls who came from the provinces to work at the machines of the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, in the 1820s and 1830s.[[169]](#footnote-169) The noise, the pollution and the long working hours that destroyed the girls' health poignantly attest to the work-logic of a business based upon the most efficient and effective use of machines. This approach resulted in a mechanical disciplining of labor, culminating, about a hundred years later, in the scientific management approach associated with Taylorism, which would exert a powerful influence in America, the Soviet Union and communist East Germany.[[170]](#footnote-170)

In the field of politics, the machine became a most popular metaphor for the workings of constitutions (Montesquieu) and, sometimes, a derogatory concept for a hierarchical political strategy perceived as "party machine" or "machine politics."[[171]](#footnote-171) The two most significant metaphoric deployments of the idea of an autonomous, self-regulating, machinelike Nature in the modern public sphere were the liberal idea of self-government and the self-regulating market. Both aimed to project rules of rational behavior free of arbitrary human power and, therefore, congenial for compliance. This approach relied on the supposedly harmonious results of the long adjustment of multiple individual acts, whether guided by the mythical invisible hand—a surrogate for divine guidance—or the spontaneous cumulative wisdom of the multitude and of tradition. Edmund Burke put this quasi-naturalistic view very clearly; it is worth quoting at greater length his observation cited earlier, that the English constitution is not the result of choice, or vision of a group of people:

It is a Constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than choice, it is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions, and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time…The individual is foolish. The multitude, for the moment, is foolish…; but the species is wise, and, when time is given to it, as a species it almost always acts right.[[172]](#footnote-172)

The Americans have generally tended to frame their constitution in rather mechanical terms. American historian Michael Kammen, for instance, described the popular imaginary of the American constitution as "a machine that goes by itself," partly accounting for the laypeople attitude of trusting indifference toward the constitution. About two hundred years earlier, Thomas Paine had focused on the material "thingness" of the American constitution, on its status as a visible object in comparison to the invisible English counterpart. Such views supported the belief that even an "illiterate mechanic" could judge the Nature of government.[[173]](#footnote-173) The materialization and objectification of constitutions and markets enhanced their perceived authority, intelligibility and accessibility to lay publics. Whereas the uses of the machine and its metaphoric applications at a workplace or party seem to connote involuntary, often coercive power and rules, in the visual culture of modern democracy, the imaginary of its materiality and impersonality have often been conducive to public credibility.

The visibility of machines has often validated also elusive scientific theories before the lay public, rendering scientific knowledge more overtly accessible and accountable.[[174]](#footnote-174) Conversely, governments and business have learned to use objectifying tropes to affect public perception, deploying the machine metaphor in order to conceal controversial human value choices and uneven distributive effects entailed in the use of technology and mechanical frames of decisions and actions.[[175]](#footnote-175)

A further dimension of objectifications of Nature, Science, and Technology relates to the very constitution of the democratic public realm and the role of material, visible objects, *qua* objects of citizen perceptions and judgments, which confirm the sense of inclusive public participation. Making up the epistemological arena of democratic politics, visible materially embodied objects, actions and effects are what the public sees and what counts for the shaping of public opinion. As elucidated in Chapter 7, it is worth reiterating in this context that visibility and the public gaze comprise the fifth element in the epistemological constitution of modern democracy preceded by individualism, causality, public facts, and objectivity. Economics—a social science widely regarded as the most "scientific" among the social academic disciplines—has, moreover, been cunningly exploited to objectify public discourse, policy and action in order to eschew the more difficult path of political persuasion. In the following chapter I will discuss more specifically the role it has played in the political context.

**Chapter 10**

**Economics as Politics by Other Means**

Upon being awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, Professor Daniel Kahneman, who, before moving to Princeton was a professor of psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was invited to address the faculty members of the Department of Economics at the Hebrew University. He opened his presentation half-jokingly with an apology to the economists— that as a social behavioral psychologist, he "stole" from them the Nobel Prize in economics that year (2002). I was shocked when some leading Hebrew University economists reacted to Kahneman's "apology" seriously, expressing their disappointment and even anger at the sight of an economics-laureate psychologist. One of the economists even asked Kahneman directly, if he did not mind that his research findings into the nonrationality and cognitive biases that characterize individual and corporate decisions on economic matters might undermine the status and power of economics as a scientific discipline that "enhances rationality in public affairs."

In order to understand the economists' negative emotional reaction to Kahneman and their rumbles of discontent, suffice it to cite the cover of his influential book *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2011):[[176]](#footnote-176)

[R]ecipient of the Nobel Prize in economic sciences for his seminal work in psychology challenging the rational model of judgment and decision-making . . . [Kahneman] reveals the pervasive influence of our intuitive impressions on our thoughts and behavior. The profound impact of loss aversion and overconfidence on corporate strategies, the difficulties of predicting what will make us happy in the future, the challenges of properly framing risks at work and at home, the profound effects of cognitive biases on everything [,] from playing the stock market to planning the next vacation . . . the two systems [the intuitive and the deliberative] work together to shape our judgments and decisions.

Such findings and insights, including the impact of unacknowledged self-interested behavior, unconscious psychological factors like risk aversion, cognitive bias or emotions were fundamental to the emergence of the subdiscipline of "behavioral economics." As such they posed a threat to the professional status and authority of economists, we must recognize the links between claims of instrumental economic rationality and claims of disinterest and objectivity.

Appointed as advisers to individuals, corporations, and governments, economists claim to be as professionally objective as physicists or astronomers. The angry response vis-à-vis behavioral-psychological accounts of economic decision-making betrays the economists' fear of losing their privileged position as agents of a social science close to the natural and exact disciplines, and unwittingly join the rest of the "softer" social sciences and the humanities, which display an "elective affinity" to the pole of *culture* in the Nature/Culture dichotomy.

The extraordinary influence of economics on politics and policy was achieved by the postulation of human rationality as the basis for their claim to be an objective science whose apolitical principal object of study is the natural self-regulating mechanism of the market, intended to enhance voluntary rational decisions of producers, salesmen, consumers and governments as the key players in the economy. It is important to recognize that the apparent detachment of economists from the value premises or political implications of their theories and recommendations, their consistent insistence on their objective rationality, are but rhetorical tropes intended to buttress their authority as professionals. The underlying function of this rhetorical style lies precisely in the projection of dispassionate objectivity as the regulating norm of market interaction and economic decision-making.[[177]](#footnote-177)

One of the main strategies to achieve what I call here 'the benefits of virtual objectivity of the scientific status and power of capitalist economy' has consisted in regarding the market as a realm of mechanical natural necessity governed by laws, whose regularities are the object of scientific understanding and a source of knowledge translatable to rational-behavioral imperatives of conduct. The fundamental strategy that has enabled to set up economics as a body of knowledge-claims and advice that operates in a political environment has been its ostensible dissociation from power and politics, and its concomitant offering of a supposedly nonpolitical alternative path for human free choices.

Up to a point, rationality was a constructive liberal fiction, overtly limiting arbitrary political decisions and endowing public policy with a degree of transparency. Coupling a narrowly defined 'rationality' with 'free choice'—prior to its qualification by behavioral economics and other challenges to the dogma of rationality—the ethos of economics had cast the larger part of humanity outside the dignified realm of "rational people."

The clear preference for the market over government bureaucracy as the natural distributor of assets has always been accompanied by a rhetoric antagonistic to the real or supposed biases, inefficiencies, and irrationality of politics and bureaucracies, shown in bad light vis-à-vis the objectivity and impersonality of the market. The uses of economics to ostensibly replace and defy politics as a basis of public economic policy were magnified by its massive resort to statistics, models, and quasi-scientific language to argue for its cases. The claims of economics to maintain neutrality in relation to both politics and religion were expressed as early as 1660 by the pioneer of economics, William Petty. The historian of Petty's work writes that:

Petty's facts were conjectural rather than observed, and they described abstractions rather than historical events. Despite these striking differences, he claimed for his facts the same degree of epistemological authority that members of the Royal Society claimed for experimental facts, but he did so not based on collective witnessing but on a peculiar mixture of claims about the precision of numerical representations and the impartiality of expert interpretation.[[178]](#footnote-178)

It is amazing to realize how these tendencies and pretentions were persevered almost unchanged for over three hundred years. The paradox lies in that the objectification of economics and other related fields, such as statistics, accounting, and urban planning acted both as checks on over-politicized governance and as concealments of political choices. They curtailed governmental power by subjecting it to visible "objective" tests of performance of government-run or regulated utilities, such as public health and public transportation. Still, of course, they have remained effective strategies for concealing the privileging of some groups over others in such systems, as well as the redistributive effects of economic policy.[[179]](#footnote-179)

Conversely, to cast utter doubt on the ethos of rationality and objectivism—the refusal to put even minimal faith in the rationality and the concern of policy-makers for public welfare—has and would have clearly been disruptive and not necessarily better than systems that rest on "productive fictions" of rationality and the service orientation of clerks to the public interest. Perhaps the fault of the Enlightenment vision of rational democracy lay in its exalted concept of rationality, whereas the flaw of the contemporary condition is that of radical public skepticism. Whereas the former cult of rationality always contained the potential for authoritarianism, radical public skepticism could easily lead to the very disintegration of government.

Obviously, any acknowledgement of cognitive biases and psychological constraints on human rationality was bound to disrupt the balance achieved in economics by the view of the market as an extension of the logic of Nature and rationality as the *differentia specifica* of the human genus. What has become unsettling in Kahneman's and Tversky's [[180]](#footnote-180) findings is their exposure of the role played by cognitive biases and emotional tendencies in destabilizing the imaginary of objectivity and rationality of human decisions, thus tilting their motivation away from the self-protective rational core towards the more erratic elements of the individual's "irrational" emotional Nature.

Despite its record of gross failures and errors, which had disastrous effects on both local and global economies, it should be clear by now that I do not intend to deny the significant contribution of economics not only to the onset of, but also to the overcoming of economic crises, to rebalancing ailing economies, usefully conceptualizing and framing fiscal and budgetary decisions and programs in mathematical equations and predicting macro-economic trends. But it must be reiterated that the same scientific and quasi-scientific rhetoric and professional authority *has* *secured* *morally and politically unwarranted advantages to specific individuals and groups under the guise of rational objective apolitical parameters of governmental choices.* Having at their disposal a professional organization, technical journals, academic status and theoretical jargon, as well as Nobel laureates, have enabled economists to partake in the political chess-game boasting credentials of scientists, wielding extra-political authority.

Here economics, buttressed by force of its claims to practicality and its entrenchment in popular materialism, actually entered power-play politics, undermining elements of manifest voluntary-participatory citizenship. The affinity of economics to the "naturalized market," the claim to nearly natural-scientific logic of what actually has been but the *fiction of the market as a natural mechanism*, and the allusions to the nomenclature of natural sciences, especially that of mathematical physics, has been enormously empowering to both its capacity to benefit and harm. Reports on the testimonies of numerous investors, who lost their money in the economic crisis of 2008, confessed to having been misled owing to publicly inaccessible mathematical models that seemed to predict favorable trends.

This whole system was bound, however, to appear very differently from the perspective of political science. British political theorist John Dunn has argued that "the market economy is the most powerful mechanism for dismantling equality that humans have ever fashioned."[[181]](#footnote-181) In other words, while denying its political involvement, market economy and its mandarins have, deliberately or not, advanced specific political agendas. The capitalist cult of the market as an automatic neutral mechanism has rendered it, therefore, more legitimate than the state and its bureaucracy for discerning trends in the national economy, and for mapping the options of individual and group behavior as producers and consumers.

This creed has enabled warranted or unwarranted predictions that have guided the choices of the principal players in the economico-political game. Their actual influence upon the distribution of assets to citizens and organizations has rendered economists the successors of the officiant priests of Apollo in the Oracle of Delphi. The well-known oracle, founded around 800 BCE, was a sacred Greek place, where Pythia, the renowned priestess, delivered messages from Apollo. It is particularly relevant to our point here that while considered sacred, the messages were ambiguous and lent themselves to many contradictory interpretations. Recently it was, indeed, suggested that in the USA "the chairperson of the Federal Reserve could be viewed as a postmodern 'Oracle of Delphi,' one who peers into assorted statistical data to predict the nation's future economic health."[[182]](#footnote-182) Who doesn't want to know the future? I should add that in any field of competition and contest—be it politics or economics— there is always a demand for an umpire. An outsider as a neutral point of reference. In many occasions, economists, supposedly representing the logic and rules of the game, have enjoyed such outsider's authority, although they have rarely been outsiders. Still, the umpire's status is a significant asset for the system.

I should reiterate that while I certainly do not mean to equate economics with sorcery, the combined myths and slogans of popular perceptions of economics—usually encouraged by the economists themselves, and their very valuable social-science achievements—have magnified their claims for extra-political and extra-personal authority. Economists' shield of self-confidence and is rarely punctured. When it is, it reveals dogmatic attachment to fixed conventions buttressed more by ideology rather than knowledge. Such a rare case occurred shortly following the economic collapse of 2008. *The Guardian* reported on 24/October/2008 that "Former Fed chief, Alan Greenspan admits 'mistake' over regulation. He conceded, *The Guardian* reports, that "the global financial crisis has exposed a mistake in the free market Ideology which guided his 18-year stewardship of US monetary policy." He confessed to discovering "a flaw in the model that I perceived in the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works." He discovered, moreover,, that the self-interests of organizations like banks have overruled their commitments to protect their shareholders. This flaw has been self-evident to political scientists specialized in organizational behavior long before.

In the history of economic thought—before the separation of economics as a discipline with narrow boundaries from politics and the social context—Adam Smith (1723-1790),[[183]](#footnote-183) David Ricardo (1772-1823)[[184]](#footnote-184) and his contemporary Thomas Malthus (1776-1834)[[185]](#footnote-185) were actually perceived as political economists who combined their knowledge and insights with their interests in issues such as the links between taxes, labor, laws, the distribution of wealth, the poor, and population growth. They openly integrated economic data with moral and political arguments and decisions about regulation and public policies, thus advancing their ideas, arguments and suggestions for reform.

When during the nineteenth century, economics emerged as an independent discipline, its abstractions and mathematical modeling encouraged an increasing shading off of explicit moral and political assumptions of their theories and models, actually subtly pushing them into the invisible latent level of their intellectual enterprise. In the course of time, many public problems and policy decisions were reduced to narrow economic considerations, becoming oblivious to their vital hidden aspects and consequences in the social and political contexts. The tensions between economics as a circumscribed discipline and politics persisted, leading to suggestions —intensified in our time—that the very economics that separated from politics should come back to political economics, a discipline that will explicitly and deliberately engage with political values, data and arguments.

A short look back at the formation of the market as a coordinating artifice in the course of the nineteenth century is instructive in appreciating its early impact on social change. For one thing it contributed to the decline of agricultural culture in the pre-capitalist era, with its hierarchical structure of dependencies on the authorities of landowners. As Michael Zakim has indicated, the end of agrarian patriarchy meant the liberation of the sons to leave the farms and seek employment and income in distant places.[[186]](#footnote-186) He sheds light on how the family bonds hitherto sustained by loyalties and warmth were replaced, in the market, by a "fraternity" of strangers, opening infinite paths for individualism, the ideal of "self-made" man, as well as the costs of alienation. Land abandoned by the young seeking employment in distant places turned money earned by labor into the wings by which they flew in the pursuit of new lives.

Such developments were associated with the rise of statistics and census as tools for describing the new market society and its trends. Social statistics and the census altered the perceptions and the imaginaries of society: As Zakim argues, such procedures "inverted the older corporate relationship between self and society." He adds:

Public life thus became a function of the interaction between a horde of discrete variables entirely divorced from any peremptory notion of what they had in common, or of what even constituted commonality to begin with. Society lost its autonomous status while being reconstituted as a "combination" of ephemeral, arbitrary experiences systematically compiled from the "minute subdivisions" of individual lives.[[187]](#footnote-187)

It is this ephemeral, abstract, statistically construed "modernized" society that came down to us since, becoming the raw fabric of economic models and abstractions, the subject of endless manipulations and predictions.

The need to legitimate economics as a discipline and economists as advisers has led some economists and theorists to advance the argument that the market economy has encouraged the transformation of human conflicts and antagonisms into negotiable and rationally resolvable conflicts of interests. Turning raw passions into interests—so the advocates claimed—could elevate unresolvable emotional antagonisms into calculated compromises. Whereas rigid emotional commitments and principles cannot be divided, when translated into assets and money, they insisted, they enable divisions and compromises. The German economist and brilliant thinker Albert Hirschman, was inspired by concerns—expressed in the writings of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Vico, Mandeville, and Adam Smith—over violent passions and their destructive, corruptive effects on politics, as well as on devising ways to restrain them. Hirschman was particularly moved by the observation of Montesquieu in his *De l'ésprit des Lois* (The Spirit of the Laws [1748]) that "it is fortunate for men to be in a situation in which, though their passions may prompt them to be wicked, they have nevertheless an interest in not being so."[[188]](#footnote-188) Tracing the history of this idea, Hirschman observes:

Ever since the end of the Middle Ages, and particularly as a result of the increasing frequency of war and civil war in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the search was on for a behavioral equivalent for the religious precept, for new rules of conduct and devices that would impose much needed discipline and constraints on both rulers and ruled, and the expansion of commerce and industry was thought to hold much promise in this regard.[[189]](#footnote-189)

In these early centuries, Capitalism appeared as a new system of rules and discipline that would improve life, a means to restrain, even escape from politics. Despite the fact that late-modern capitalism appears as the exact opposite—a form of unrestrained greed and even frenzied desire for money and goods—capitalism, its custodians and many contemporary economists still maintain and cultivate this system as a check on, or an alternative to politics and arbitrary bureaucracies.

The tempting idea that the economy, the market, commerce and banks are elements of a contemporary system of constraint "on rulers and the ruled" is, of course, preposterous. By contrast to Hirschman, Bruno Latour appropriately acknowledges the emotional dimension latent in the relentless pursuit of greed and economic interests, which he regards as "passionate interests," on which he comments that a mistake seems to have been made "about the temperature and rhythms of economic passions."[[190]](#footnote-190) Moreover, the idea cultivated by advocates of the friendliness of the market to the democratic value of free-individual choice has, time and again, appeared as a cruel delusion of endless people who fell prey to this naïve faith.

It has become more widely recognized that when self-interest is unrestrained by education or unchecked by public-oriented state regulation, it could easily prove to be socially and morally disastrous. Still, in more unobtrusive forms, when undistorted by the collusion between capital and political power, when the terms of transactions are reasonably clear and transparent, economists' insights are beneficial—even vital. Within and beyond economy, risk-taking is an integral part of decision-making in areas such as medical treatment or choice of schools, residence and the like, whereby the individual must inevitably gamble.

Economy— for some, "the dismal science"— is a complex and dynamic human enterprise which does not lend itself to easy and simple explanations. Following years, and even generations of denial, it is not surprising that in our time, leading economists and economic theorists are increasingly seeking to expose the political, emotional, and ideological factors inscribed in the DNA of economics and present it as a dramatic discovery. But already in 1932, Carl Schmitt observed that "a domination of men based upon pure economics must appear a terrible deception if, by remaining nonpolitical, it thereby evades political visibility and responsibility."[[191]](#footnote-191) Karl Polanyi famously argued that already in the nineteenth century, the market, as a self-regulating mechanism and liberal economy, had become a "secular religion."[[192]](#footnote-192) Earlier and later critiques of the disruptive, insidious invasiveness of economics into the arena of politics, intuited or recognized that economic advisers, unaware of its political premises and effects, are morally and socially blind.

Frederic Jameson, a neo-Marxist literary scholar, added his voice when he observed that the "ideology of the market" is "Leviathan in sheep's clothing: its function is not to encourage and perpetuate freedom but, rather, to repress it."[[193]](#footnote-193) In his enigmatic “An inquiry into modes of existence” (2013), Latour aptly traces a strong relation between transferring the vital functions of the political domain to courts of experts, particularly economists, and the people's gradual abandonment of the *agora.[[194]](#footnote-194)* The vision of the Enlightenment was not that of a silent empty agora, of choices made above peoples' heads under the cover of "objective knowledge." It was a vision of a bustling agora, where public issues are debated and a multitude of diverse voices are fused to produce trends and make joint decisions.

One of the most dramatic exposures of what can be labeled politically and morally blind economics—economics that pushes decisions aided by unwarranted objectifications, took place in Israel during the early decades of the twenty-first century. The business supplement *The Marker* of *Ha’aretz*[[195]](#footnote-195) had daily exposed years of free-market rhetoric as a cover for centralized radically discriminatory pyramids of property-owners and business-leaders run by a small group of privileged family tycoons in one of the most unequal socio-economic systems of the West. As I previously suggested, the economists who reacted negatively to Daniel Kahneman's research on cognitive biases in economic decisions and advice had intuited, or realized, that the age of "neutral and objective" economics—to the extent that it ever existed, beyond limited times and places—was over. In contradistinction to Kahneman's cognitive biases, what the above critics imply is the subordination of economic to political logic. In a review of a book by Robert B. Reich,[[196]](#footnote-196) Paul Krugman notes that it is "obvious to the naked eye that our economy consists much more of monopolies and oligopolists than it does of the atomistic, price-taking competitors economists often envision." He observes further that

Reich makes a very good case that widening inequality largely reflects political decisions that could have gone in very different directions. The rise in market power reflects a turn away from antitrust laws that looks less and less justified by outcomes, and in some cases the rise in market power is the result of the raw exercise of political clout to prevent policies that would limit monopolies.[[197]](#footnote-197)

In his highly acclaimed *Capital* *in the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Piketty observed that whereas studies support the claim that the evolution of prices and wages during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries partly sustains the opinion that autonomous economic logic had a significant influence in the past, since the twentieth century, "such an illusion falls apart immediately . . . politics is ubiquitous and . . . economic and political changes are inextricably intertwined and must be studied together."[[198]](#footnote-198) Again, what is described here is economics as a partly concealed actor in the political power-play, in struggles for grabbing assets and profits, rather than as an aid of politics as the process by which citizens define the parameters of their collective life and navigate the state resource allocation and actions in order to cater to their priorities.

Given such dysfunctional concealments of the tacit value and political priorities inherent in economics when applied to public policy, it appears that the most desirable way to grapple with such problems is to openly go back to a modern version of political economics which will explicitly combine political and economic considerations, resisting pressures to cover up the political components of a "rational economic policy."

The massive attack on the reputation of economists has triggered a growing critical assessment and self-criticism by economists devoted to "save the reputation of their profession."[[199]](#footnote-199) Hebrew University economist Professor Avi Ben-Bassat has published a suggestion of a new ethical code for economists intended, for instance, to ensure that economic advice is specifically mindful of the public welfare and warn against any negative impact on the public interest. Advisers should expose moreover any involvement of individuals or bodies having a stake in the outcome of the recommendations. It is imperative to warn against any illegal and immoral actions; to be on guard against and avoid actions or transactions involving situations prone to a conflict of interests and avoid granting disproportional rewards and presents to involved participants.[[200]](#footnote-200) The careful implementation of such code, in tandem with an assessment of the costs and benefits of deliberately intertwined economico-political public policies and their effects on the social allocation of scarce collective material and symbolic resources will enable a more favorable grappling with the unstable demarcation lines between necessity and culture, materialism and values, the world's natural limits, and the commitment to both freedom and equality.

**Chapter 11**

**The Virtual Objectification of the Law**

Inspired by Gilbert Chesterton, Omer Schwartz observed that "the legal system serves as one of the institutions that hides humanity from itself."[[201]](#footnote-201) Law has been no less a mode and a system for objectifying and depoliticizing human decisions and actions than natural science, economics and technology. As we shall see in the following, although in parliamentary democracies the legislative process is unambiguously political, when it ends with the confirmation that the law has passed, even by one vote, the legislated law is assumed to be an apolitical, universally binding directive. This sudden transformation of a political process into an apolitical directive is one of the most ingenious inventions aimed at barring the illegitimate use of political power and violence to enforce order when its subjects do not voluntarily obey.

The fact that the status of the law is above that of politics and raw coercion, constitutes, perhaps, the clearest instantiation of the benefits entailed in objectification as a strategy of depoliticization. The historical roots of the power of objectified law to regulate behavior trace back to the naturalization of the law, as well as to the legislators' "apparent" agreement on content, or, alternatively, on the procedure that majority decisions bind also the minority and form the basis of legitimate professional legal and constitutional decisions.

Unlike the objectification of technology or of economic advice, the objectification of the law—following a parliamentary political debate and intra-parliamentary political transactions—has been universally accepted as a necessary means for the institution and maintenance of the liberal-democratic socio-political order. There were, of course, schools of law which attempted to partially repoliticize the authority of the law by exposing the normative and political choices inherent in each law and legal judgment. Jerome Frank's "rule-skepticism" and the whole school of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) are illustrative of this tendency.[[202]](#footnote-202) The relatively limited impact of this movement on legislative and judicial practice demonstrates the objective status of the law as a widely respected necessary **fiction**, a fiction not fully appreciated by positivist fact-and-truth-minded legal theorists.[[203]](#footnote-203) As Judith Shklar argued, "The possibility of treating law as a conceptual pattern entirely distinct from all political, moral and social values and institutions is simply taken for granted," despite the fact that "the treatment of the law as a neutral social entity . . . does considerable violence to politics."[[204]](#footnote-204)

In the context of Western dualistic naturalistic cosmology, the opposite of voluntary politics regulated by law is arbitrary naturalized force, brutal violence and dominion—manifested in different versions of the Hobbesian state of Nature. Yet the dichotomy between violence and law with regard to politics does not address the place of violence in empowering law and the legal use of force. From a Hobbesian perspective, extralegal violence is a natural exercise of original force that represents the disruptive invasion of "Nature" into the domain of contracted polity, whereby violence must be sanctioned by the law.

A history of human extralegal violence cannot, therefore, be a part of the history of normal or ordinary politics but of its disruptions, unless it refers to actions of the sovereign or revolutions intended to establish, save, or reform a legal order. It is instructive that when "natural" extra or paralegal power disrupts a legally regulated system, it cannot be objectified within the system which suggests the distinction between the state and the state of Nature.

Mahatma Gandhi's politics of nonviolence is an example of an attempt to rectify discriminatory power relations incompatible with human freedom by the force of the mass, albeit nonviolent demonstrations. Such illegal, if peaceful, strategy constitutes, in fact, a form of liminal power play, of tacit nonviolent power exercised on the border or margin of politics and the law—or, in terms of cosmological dualism—on the seam of nature and culture. If one judges, or seeks to justify violence ex post facto, its failure to redress a state of arbitrary domination may retrospectively be judged as belonging to Nature in the Hobbesian sense, rather than to politics and culture. In practice, even justifying the violence entailed in a successful revolution in terms of the stated goal of liberation is rarely warranted, because such a fine tuning of revolutionary violence—to precisely serve the noble goal to promote freedom—is often unrealistic, and, considering the ambiguities inherent in any revolutionary violence and its consequences, problematic.

Hobbes' imaginary division between war in the state of Nature and the reign of law in civil society has encouraged a classification according to which war and illegal violence belong to the state-of-Nature pole of the dichotomy, while violence exerted to protect the security of the citizenry corresponds to the cultural one, inasmuch as it is legitimized by tacit agreement. This, of course, is an idealistic or theoretical frame. In any case, the demarcation lines between the state of Nature and the state of civil society remain ambiguous, although it is the premise of both that individual security is paramount.

It is, however, precisely this ambiguity that sets the terms for the modern discourse on the state and the place of violence in relation to the law. Walter Benjamin held that "in the exercise of violence over life and death more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself."[[205]](#footnote-205) Benjamin adds that it is formless power that becomes an "all pervasive ghostly presence in the life of civilized states." He elucidates, "All violence as a means is either law-making or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity."[[206]](#footnote-206) I interpret Benjamin's argument here as postulating that the fiction of objectified law entails legitimate, legally instrumental violence within and of the law.

In contrast to Isiah Berlin's concept of freedom as freedom from oppression by the governors, of freedom granted by generous enlightened rulers, I believe that leaving the citizens no recourse to politically resist their governors is incompatible with freedom. I endorse Hobbes' belief—and its interpretation by thinkers such as Quentin Skinner—that political freedom is unthinkable without the right and potential of each individual citizen to reclaim his or her natural power to break the stipulation of the social contract to obey the government and even to resort to self-preserving violence as a last resort of self-defense.

Already in the Athenian democracy, the "demos could be free only by controlling power and participating in government."[[207]](#footnote-207) Thus, the liberty to take up arms for the sake of freedom was a legacy of Athenian democracy. It follows that inasmuch as law, lawmaking, law-preserving and politics are inseparable from the recourse to the actual or deterrent force of popular violence, law and politics always reside in the borderline of the dualistic cosmological dichotomy oscillating between Nature and culture. "When the consciousness of the latent presence of violence in a legal institution disappears"—says Benjamin—"the institution falls into decay."[[208]](#footnote-208) So, depending on its kind and on the circumstances, violence, according to this view, may both enable and threaten politics.

Concepts of a pure autonomous law, totally detached from violence and politics, conveniently eschew the role of violence and political imaginaries in creating and protecting the respective realms of politics and the law, as well as endorsing the useful fiction of their total separation. Judith Shklar observed that "although it is philosophically deeply annoying, human institutions survive because most of us can live comfortably with wholly contradictory beliefs."[[209]](#footnote-209) The imaginary cultivated by judges and jurists of legalism as wholly apolitical; the claim that it is autonomous, whereas it is, in fact, not fully so, is precisely such a case of coexisting formal and tacit contradictory beliefs. Jurists cultivate the neutral imaginary of apolitical law inasmuch as economists defend the "apolitical" market and its rules.

Like the Nature/Culture dichotomy, the wisdom of artificially dividing the imaginaries of law and politics opens up a whole range of institutional, procedural and regulatory possibilities, whose unification would have foreclosed. To reiterate, the most important one is, of course, the uses of the law to ostensibly curtail politics and formless arbitrary power. Insofar as ideology and politics are part of the genesis and "genetics" of the law, *by ostensibly denying its political genealogy and implications, law becomes a means by which politics actually limits itself.*

We can understand Walter Benjamin's realistic perspective on the power latent in law and politics as alluding to the gloss over the presence of violence inherent in both and concealed as part of their formation. Even the very autonomy of groups and politics is inconceivable without latent deterrent physical or political power. To the extent that such contrived or gestural obliviousness to the inseparability of politics, law and violence serve to buttress the rule of law and enhance politics as constraints on raw violence, its instrumentality compensates for its factual inaccuracy, but not for its misuse.

Western tradition displays a particularly interesting example of a philosophically untenable but instrumentally convenient coexistence of a (1) supposedly apolitical law, (2) of law instantly depoliticized, following its legislation by means of parliamentary political process and (3) of positive law —the existing law issued by the reigning power.[[210]](#footnote-210) Each of those approaches, emended in Western law, imply a different basis of objectification. The former relies mostly on the supposed objective universality of the content of the law (Kant). The second objectification of the law relies on an obliging parliamentary procedure governed by majorities. By contrast positive law achieves its authority by the attempt of hegemonic power to impose laws to maintain order.

Instrumental to the authority of the law is also the distinction between natural law and politics. Unlike positive law, generated directly by the existing power in order to avoid chaos, rebellion and to discipline society, the principles or rules of natural law— such as human self-preservation and the inalienable natural rights of all men— have enjoyed, for long, (actually starting since the Twelve Century) the status of being universal, immutable, self-evident, objective and, therefore, immune to local, social or cultural differences.[[211]](#footnote-211)

Historically, the status of natural law has been, indeed, subject to periods of rise and decline. The period following the collapse of Nazism and fascism is marked by a European revival of natural law as a reaction to the Nazi version of positive law associated with fascism and other authoritarian systems: "Quite naturally"—argues Gottfried Dietze—"refuge was sought in natural law… in the restoration of the dignity of man in a political society. . . . Natural Law thus played a decisive role in the quest for constitutionalism."[[212]](#footnote-212)

Another source for the appeal of natural law in socially and politically divided societies was its association with an imaginary of universally shared humanity. This association, Shklar observes critically, empowered natural law "to induce agreement beyond all divisions." She further notes that any reliance on Nature has often meant to oppose not only to a world in which moral diversity flourishes, but also to that ideology which cherishes this variety as the true expression of individual freedom."[[213]](#footnote-213) Again, we see here different and somewhat opposed political uses of natural law. In both cases—as enhancing or restricting individual freedom—the power of natural law in the social context has largely depended upon its capacity to disassociate itself from politics, both as a power play—a participatory voluntary enterprise—and as a norm. As I have previously noted, similar considerations have actually influenced the emergence of a modern imaginary of economics, science, and technology as autonomous enterprises separated from politics, concomitantly serving as sources of extensively applicable and instrumental authorities in public affairs.

As a strategy that derives from the emergence of the world as an entity separate from man, from a view of nature as the "mother" of all objects, objectification has both functionally and dysfunctionally empowered and over-empowered science, technology, economics and law, as well as numerous other fields of discourse and actions, which have, for long, ruled supreme in the social context of public trust, on the usually false grounds of being rationally and technically compelling, leaving almost no space for ethical and political considerations.

To conclude, the separation of human beings and the world was a necessary condition for the rise of voluntary individualism, the self, the soul, individual agency and, eventually, all the other elements of democratic political epistemology: horizontal and bottom-up political causality, public facts as the currency of governments and citizens, the visibility and accountability of power and objectivity, as well as objectifications of professional concepts of reality and authority. We shall turn now to the collapse of this epistemological constitution of contemporary democracy that had mediated the relations between citizens and power since the Enlightenment.

Part IV

THE EROSION OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSTITUTION OF MODERN DEMOCRACY

Introduction

A particularly telling barometer of the incipient breakdown in the Nature/Culture divide underlying the epistemological conventions which had rendered modern science a major source of apolitical authority in the modern democratic state has been the scope and intensity of the reactions to the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962)*.* Kuhn (as was mentioned above,) argued that scientific knowledge is the common property of a group. Scientific fact and theory are not categorically separable. A given community of scientists share a paradigm, a set of assumptions, standards, problem definitions, criteria of validity and practice. Kuhn points out that their work is reinforced by shared training, instruments and goals which form what he calls "normal science."

Significant progress of science does not take place within the framework of a given paradigm in a linear cumulative way. It occurs, instead, as a result of a crisis, when research within the given paradigm is shaken by gaps between theory and empirical evidence and by a series of failures to solve key problems. This state of affairs leads to a paradigm change, a revolution in the "worldview" of the scientific community, as well as to the rise of new questions, new problem definitions, novel standards and research techniques. The "citizens" of the revolutionized scientific community speak different languages and carry different identity cards. The progress of science was understood by Kuhn as a series of radical shifts in the way communities of scientists came to look on the "same" world or, rather, came to see the world as different from their predecessors. This meant the fashioning of new concepts and new theoretical entities—to think in terms of oxygen rather than dephlogisticated air, or of Einstein's space-time rather than Newtonian space and time.

Kuhn became a target for the heavy criticism levelled by strictly positivist natural scientists, who privileged the role of strict empirical research that extracts evidence from observable, measurable empirical phenomena. Positivism in science diminishes the role of the creative theoretical imagination in relation to supposedly given natural facts. Positivists tend also to believe in the progress of science as a linear accumulation of "truth"-supported evidence.

The viral diffusion of the antagonistic reactions to this book—mostly from the part of natural scientists—was striking, becoming a milestone in the socio-history of science.The book provoked also waves of response from the masses of educated laypeople. Many social scientists, humanists and the cultured welcomed what they construed as the diminished claims of natural science to define ahistorical definitive truth. Many social scientists saw a growing parallel between the indeterminism, inherent—according to Kuhn—in the theories of both the natural and the social sciences.

Both Kuhn and some of his associates, such as Clifford Geertz, were puzzled by the extraordinary responses to the book. They wondered what about this work, and the ways it was interpreted and misinterpreted, triggered such intense engagement. Geertz wrote that Kuhn "had prayed for rain and got a flood."[[214]](#footnote-214) I think that the causes behind the remarkable impact made by the book were improperly understood. The antagonism triggered by the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* clearly indicates that it had touched a most sensitive nerve in the cognitive and normative presuppositions of modern science, its fundamental orientations towards the question of how knowledge is made, what validates it and what composes our conception of reality. There were, to be sure, those who regarded Kuhn's work as a mere breakthrough in the history and understanding of science, claiming that this book revealed the complex informal socio-psychological considerations that underlie the formation, establishment and discrediting of scientific theories. Others, criticized by Geertz, radically argued that by privileging the theoretical imagination that frames the scientific view of the world as largely construed by the mind over the supposed givenness of the world as raw sense-experience, the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* undermined the very notion and ontology of scientific truth, that it relativized the sources of knowledge, demystifying its authority, originality, and the discoveries of scientists, shattering the protective shield of reason.

These critics understood Kuhn's observations on the changes in scientific views of the world as questioning the very core of the process of scientific progress and the impersonal authority of science. Clifford Geertz complained about these "cries of 'subjectivism,' 'irrationalism,' 'mob psychology,' and, of course, 'relativism'… [Directed] against *Structure* and against Kuhn himself by people from whom one would expect a higher level of argument, of disbelieving in the existence of an external world."[[215]](#footnote-215) This comment, I believe, unintentionally suggests that well-above issues of ontology and epistemology, Kuhn's thesis, in fact, unsettled a more foundational modern Western imaginary of the world as external to man, the modern dualistic hegemonic cosmology, and, in particular, the very possibility that scientific assertions about the physical world are not affected by particular human, cognitive, perceptual or normative frames.

This implicit repudiation of the foundational separation of world and man as the premise behind the authority of scientific knowledge is, in my opinion—what explains the unusually intense intuitive reactions to this book, an explanation clearly more fundamental than, but not incompatible with Geertz's explanation. It appears that more contemporary debates between physicists on the meaning and implications of quantum mechanics support the intuition and the fear of Kuhn's critics, who accused him of disbelieving in the very existence of a given external world as a material object. Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate in physics, argues that, contrary to Newton's theory of motion and gravitation that "had set the standard of deterministic laws" and the assumption "that the world is governed by impersonal physical laws that control human behavior with everything else," with quantum physics, human beings are confronted with the laws of Nature at the most fundamental level. According to Eugene Wigner, a pioneer of quantum mechanics, "[i]t was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way *"without reference to the consciousness*" (emphasis, mine).[[216]](#footnote-216) On account of the apparent reunification of man and nature—the erosion of the basis for viewing science as an objective explication for given natural entities and regularities external to Man—Kuhn's thesis constitutes a challenge that goes beyond the epistemological premises of his contemporary science. In some sense, Kuhn's challenge of the Man/Nature dichotomy —as a basis for methodologies for the generation of objective scientific knowledge free of any subjectivities—perhaps "subversively" anticipated the postmodern reunification of Man and Nature in the secular monistic cosmology of the Anthropocene era.

In order to assess the full dimensions of the decline of this modern-era dualistic cosmology in our time and its consequences for the collapse of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy, we need to examine more closely the decline of Nature as an object external to man; its consequences for the waning of modern autonomous liberal individualism, and the increasing failure of the objectifications of Nature, science, technology, economics and law in contemporary society. I shall, firstly, discuss its effects on *contemporary civic individualism*, considering the spreading anxiety and uncertainty surrounding the sense that the classical checks on relativism have been stalling. Late-modern individuals have lost the equipment, the epistemological means of civic democratic citizens; its stabilizing effects on contemporary lay conceptions of common-sense reality, their perceptions of the location and transparency of political power and, consequently, of political accountability.

The decline of the imaginary of Nature as an autonomous, self-regulating entity external to man issued, perhaps, with the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), when modern machinery and industrial factories begun to have an increasingly significant impact on "given Nature." This waning has exacerbated, since then, with the growing frequency whereby human beings have found their fingerprints in Nature—an unsettling process that, beyond the imprint of our scientific mind on the scientific accounts of the fabric of nature— is culminating in our time in the drama of our adverse physical impact on the threatening rise in average global temperature, leading to the melting of glaciers and to a global sea level rise, in tandem with air and water pollution, the latter spreading poisonous contamination of rivers, lakes and oceans.

These changes in the 1960s and 1970s are also reflected in the emergence and the growing use of the word "environment," that evolved a new vocabulary which has replaced an indifferent given "nature," suggesting, instead, a continual interaction between man and the world and, more recently, a new era of decisive human impact on the state, behavior, and prospect of "Nature" in our planet.[[217]](#footnote-217)

According to some critics, this stage reflects the peak of human "divine" mandate in the Book of Genesis, which has been translated over time into arrogant desire for mastery over Nature. The fear and anxiety triggered by these developments have generated a world-movement, backed up by many international organizations, devoted to mitigating the growing abuse of natural resources, which risks the future of our planet.[[218]](#footnote-218) This state of affairs ironically evokes an inverse version of Lucretius' (55-99 BCE) famous poem *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things), inspired by Epicureanism (307 BCE). The poem was intended to emancipate humanity from the fears that natural disasters are divine retributions for human sins. Lucretius attributed these disasters to the ways of Nature, independent of God or Man. It was a very early step towards an independent notion of the physical— anticipating a scientific account of natural disasters. In our era, divine retribution has been largely replaced by self-inflicting punishment. Natural disasters are largely attributed to governmental failures to build or reinforce dams to avoid floods, construct buildings that would survive earthquakes and storms, to ruthless human abuses of Nature and above all to sacrifices of the public good by brutal capitalism. Religious responses to natural disasters have been superseded by an effort to develop a new global ethics of restraint and conservation. Obviously, the impingement of man into chains of natural causes and effects; the contemporary perception of natural causality as mixed with intended and unintended collective human behavior and action, heavily contributed to the increasing difficulty of believing in purely natural causality and facts, and, hence, in the power of their metaphoric deployment as checks or rationales in social and political contexts. Again, we see part of the consequences of the replacement of an autonomous-external Nature by an interactive Nature-Man compound of late-and post-modern democracy.

My concern is with the impact effected by the elimination of the distance between Man and Nature on the decline of the crucial place of Nature since the seventeenth century, as a foundation for the evolution of modern democratic regimes. The gradual meltdown of the Nature/Culture dichotomy in our time is triggering far-reaching direct and indirect changes in the assumptions, the capabilities and the cultural equipment of contemporary human beings.

In the following, I will focus on the erosion of the five key elements of modern democratic epistemology: Firstly, *individualism*, the basis of liberal democracy and the democratic citizen as its principal agent; secondly, the assumption that democracy consists in the capacity of human beings to be regarded as *causes* of politics and generate democratic *bottom-up and horizontal political causalities* (which replaced former top-bottom hierarchical causalities)*.* Thirdly, the accessibility of political reality-like verisimilitude of nature, as an assortment of *public facts*. Fourthly, the centrality of *visibility* as a condition of human-political interaction and political accountability. Finally, the recognition of an inanimate, mostly apolitical domain of material *objects* and the powers to extend it through *objectification* in order to de-politicize and de-ethicalize fields of public action.

Chapter 12

**The Political Disempowerment of the Modern Democratic Citizen**

Inasmuch as the otherness of Nature has facilitated the emergence and flourishing of the modern imaginary of the autonomous individual as the civic citizen of democracy, the contemporary remerging of Nature and humanity has posed a challenge. Even without fully embracing the conception of the anthropocene era, the radical extension of the domain of human freedom to intervene and control onto the formerly autonomous domain of Nature suffices to remove objective Nature as a necessary condition for binding the realm of the modern individual to the necessities of the "external world." Leaving humankind imprint on every sphere of Nature, has erased Man's alienation from the world as object—the ultimate foundation of the amoral limits on human freedom, a basis for distinguishing unconstrained arbitrariness from bounded freedom.

In order to structure and empower human freedom, the Enlightenment added to the objective status of external Nature *qua* limit, also human rationality as a capacity to guide individual navigation between "objective truth" and the human will—the respective realms of science and politics. The endorsement of the imaginary of modern democracy entailed a commitment to the perception of human beings as unique individuals capable of independent judgment, guided by reason and based on "natural facts" and values. Obviously, one of the greatest challenges to the very imaginary of individual democratic citizens as voluntary deliberative agents has been the increasing sense that—contrary to the characteristic overconfidence of the Enlightenment in rationality as a link between individual citizens and the governmental and political processes—the social and the political record suggest far more complex human and political links.

With the slow disappearance of the independent world of Nature as an object external to man; with the deterioration of the Nature/Culture dualism of modern cosmology, also the dualism between the physical and the cultural self—the emotional and the rational individual—has become more obscure. Following the Enlightenment, the increasing ambiguities concerning the limits imposed by nature and its status as an object external to humans have unsettled the firm basis of rationality as a normative code of human behavior.

The assumed rationality of political man has begun to be more overtly perceived as mixed with and frequently eclipsed by the sway of the imagination, fears, anxieties, anger, narcissism, materialism, cognitive biases, hatred and other emotions that distort or erase what was conceived of as "rational" considerations in human conduct. Obviously, among the many manifestations of the sense of uncertainty that has permeated the common social imaginary of the individual and of the individual's own self-perception as a knowing and knowable entity, have come to the fore the enhanced ambiguities of human identities and actions, as well as their interpretation. But in the specific political-civic context, the growing disappearance of the individual as a civic agent has been triggered by the dramatic breakdown of the very trappings necessary for its functioning as a democratic agent— including a socially shared commonsensical view of how the political system works, how political actions yield political effects, how basic horizontal and bottom-up human actions engender or demote governments.

Other factors that have complicated, and actually threatened autonomous individualism as a necessary feature of liberal democratic epistemology and ethics—to the point of claiming even "the death of the subject"—are the increasing tendency to blur the sharp distinction between human beings and animals, and the merger of human actions with technology. These developments have repeatedly raised the question of what the boundaries of humanity are, a question that has preoccupied many thinkers and public advocates since the late twentieth century. Some spokespersons have advanced the argument that human beings have established protective walls beyond which there is a whole world of animals, objects, including often also people defined as savages or primitives. I will not enter here into the battlefield of the ongoing clash of biological and moral arguments defending or attacking this position. It has obviously engaged also the entire controversy over racism and, in another context, over justifications for eating or abstaining from the consumption of animals.

Our concern with these issues relates to the changing place of Nature in contemporary cosmology, epistemology and politics. We have already considered above why the modern dichotomy of Nature/Culture, world/humans, has never been absolute. Still, we must be mindful and appreciate the change from a cosmological dualism to a cosmological—this time nonreligious—monism, the complexity of the transition between these cosmologies and their associated ontologies and epistemologies. Obviously, when the current secular monistic cosmological reintegration of man and nature has emerged, it has naturally led to reimagining and reconceptualizing the relations of human and non-human organisms.

Feminist thinkers such as Donna J. Haraway have criticized, from a new perspective, the modern dualist cosmology for its placing women in Nature rather than in culture or history. Similar segregations have also characterized the naturalization of natives by colonial occupiers in the five continents. The argument is that by separating politics and physiology, dualism has provided a modern reinforcement to the subordination of women and to the setting up of categories of humans perceived as inferior to men or subhuman. The current attempts at debunking such gender hierarchy, as well as the hierarchical position of Western man vis-à-vis "inferior" humans and animals has imposed new cultural and mental constraints on the exploitation of women, "primitives" and animals.

Conversely, the de-objectification of the physical world as an external constraint on human discourse and action has—as I have indicated above—opened up the way for human mastery, reinforcing the shift from the Holocene Epoch (roughly the geological period that began 11,700 years ago up to the present) to the Anthropocene.[[219]](#footnote-219) From the narrower perspective of this study, the reimagining of animals as having rights, and the welding of humans and machines as actors and participants in society and politics, risk the overextension of the category of the human as the attribute of a being "that exists as a person." Such criticism can be leveled at Haraway's *cyborg*-a term initially coined by Manfred Clynes in 1960- which she defines as "a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine…a cybernetic organism…a creature of social reality and of fiction."[[220]](#footnote-220) Also criticized for partly dehumanizing action are Latour's *actants*, a term which stands for entities in action-network theory.

This approach has aimed at replacing the hegemonic dichotomy of subjects and objects with an alternative theory, whereby the boundaries between human and nonhuman agents are blurred or cancelled. The material-semiotic perspective they advance focuses on an imaginary of interacting *networks* between human and nonhuman agents, including inanimate things and machines, which form dynamic assemblages, generating "social actions" and processes that compose the socio-material whole. By undercutting the bases of voluntarism, these theories raise acute problems vis-à-vis politics, especially within political regimes committed to responsible voluntary individual participation.

Haim Hazan, an Israeli anthropologist and sociologist, argues that the integration of robots, pets, laboratory animals and cinematic figures into human-like domains, whereby they are invested with moral, emotional, and pedagogical attributes as socio-cultural actors, "blurs categorical boundaries by according a human quality to the manifestly inhuman."[[221]](#footnote-221) This tendency has been exacerbated in many postmodern areas, including photography, suggesting freedom from limits imposed by human referents. If we seek to explore new imaginaries of democracy in our time, what Hazan describes as the postmodern zeal to hybridize, assimilate and make everything interactive, does not seem very helpful.

The desire to transgress established boundaries and reclassify the human and nonhuman elements of our experience is not unreasonable, but any suggested classification must, from our point of view, be congenial to the promotion of human values, freedom, individual responsibility, horizontal accountability and discourse between all participants. The hybridity of humans and nonhumans may endanger the nexus of freedom and responsibility. We have discussed in earlier chapters the massive use of science and technology to conceal political choices in the name of necessity and instrumental rationality. The hybridization of humans and nonhumans, of actors and machines, has but exacerbated this tendency, enabling actors and decision-makers to escape from responsibility by blaming machines, computers, formal models, system requirements and the like for failures of policies and actions.

In any imaginary of democracy adapted to our time, the need to protect the integrity and accountability of individual policy-makers and actors requires not so much the welding of humans and nonhumans, but a discernment of the choices and interests that have guided designers of machines, programmers of computer software, engineers and planners—in other words, "humanizing" the machines. That would, at least, clarify the value of the fabric of human-machine hybrids.

Against the powerful logic and myth of mechanism and instrumentalism, democrats should always ask whether "humanized" machines serve politics of freedom. That raises the question of whom the stress on the machine component of the new hybridization serves. In other words, by "dephysicalizing," do we actually re-humanize, re-politicize and re-ethicalize machines as proxies of people, values and interests that have shaped and legitimated them either by themselves or as welded to human agents? An awareness of the political and ethical considerations entailed in the software and hardware of machines actually diminishes the provocation and innovation of cyborgs, actants and other male/female machine hybrids. Cyborgs are human actors through and through, with the only difference that when it comes to electronic networks, the parts called "machines" are more remote and invisible in both time and space.

Besides the actual transformations of the common imaginary of the modern individual and the novel circumstances that challenge the very possibilities of civic individualism, the loss of supporting civic epistemology as a necessary condition for the work and participation of democratic citizens has been most ruinous. The fragmentation and uncertainties surrounding lay understanding of political causes and effects is a major factor in the collapse of democratic civic epistemology. I turn now to the decline of the democratic epistemological category of political causality.

**Chapter 13**

**The Elusiveness of Political Causality**

Given the modern obliteration of legitimate top-down vertical causality generated by divinity, superhuman beings and kings, an increasing contemporary distrust of its replacement by horizontal socio-political and bottom-up political causality has significantly contributed to the crisis in contemporary democracies. Democracies traditionally attempted to institutionalize bottom-up and horizontal political causalities by calling periodic elections and garnering legal endorsements of party roles. The implicit purpose of these moves has been to influence individual and collective dispositions to attribute to the people and civic associations the capacity to generate political causation and abide by the paths of democratic legitimation.

I argue that such institutions have lost, in our time, much of their former power to represent democratic political causalities that enable the establishment, as well as the replacement of governments. With respect to horizontal channels of political influence by means of various forms of social interactions—they were, by definition, protected *qua* voluntary associations from institutionalization and regulation by the state. The whole point of civic associations such as parties, trade-unions, non-governmental associations (NGOs) and, more recently, voluntarily self-organized cyber communities (social media) lies in their character as voluntary associations. Underlying trust in institutionalized and voluntary democratic political causalities have constituted, of course, key components of a shared imaginary of democracy. Also in a theocracy, faith in a transcendental God substantiates common notions of top-down cause and effects and their partial institutionalization through prayers, rituals, and sacred rules. In both cases, it is the declining power of beliefs in the hegemonic imaginary of an order that heavily contributes to the weakening of the supporting rules, institutions and trust in the system.

With respect to both bottom-up and horizontal political causality, the reasons for and signs of their diminished powers are manifold. One of the causes for the increasing ambiguity of political cause-and-effect in contemporary democracies has been the decline of ideologies and parties as political instruments for integrating political values, public preferences and garnering multiple attitudes and interests. Ideologies and parties have lost their former capacity to serve as bridges between the people and the government and provide long-term public policy directives. Their dissipation as means of even temporarily packaging large political groups as political actors has blurred the face of the public as a participant in the democratic process.

The appearance of politicians and lay commentators on television has encouraged widespread public illusions of making an almost instant contact between leaders, to the effect of shrinking public investments in the party apparatus. The illusion of immediacy created by the media has carried more legitimation than the distant indirect mediation of parties and ideologies.[[222]](#footnote-222) In well-developed democracies, a significant part of civic horizontal political causality has been assumed by non-governmental voluntary associations, which focus on a diversity of goals, such as equality, environment, war against corruption and the like. In some democracies, such as the USA under President Trump and Israel in the time of Prime Minister Netanyahu, such civic organizations became targets of legislation or directives intended to cut their funds and harass their members for fear of their potential resistance to right-wing policies.

During recent decades, the potential for horizontal cyber- communication and the creation of cyber communities has raised high hopes for the strengthening of horizontal political causality. I will show, in the following, how many such hopes were dashed by unanticipated effects of the internet, the fragmentation of horizontal cyber communications into multiple close sectarian communities which share and cultivate narrow political views and basically close themselves to other political worldviews, towards which they often display antagonism. Another problem dramatically surged mostly since 2016, when the monumental dimension of cyber manipulation of political communications and elections demonstrated the ease with which Western democratic elections could be disrupted and their outcome swayed by hackers working for authoritarian states such as Russia.[[223]](#footnote-223)

Also, beyond the Net, unorganized and dispersed citizens, unable to articulate specific political goals and policy preferences, have weakened the status of the “people,” or the “sovereign.” What used to be “the people” or “the public” has become an amorphous raw material for the rise of the semi-democratic politics of populism.[[224]](#footnote-224) Perhaps the most salient cause for the deterioration of democracies has been the degeneration of contemporary publics.

Devoid of bridging and mediating mechanisms such as effective political parties, trade-unions media not held hostage by business and government, and—in the face of an illegible public—also democratic governments have found themselves at a loss when generating policies and programs targeted to balance a wide range of incommensurable and competing needs and demands that might still carry significant political pay-offs. This is one of the reasons that “public policies” generated by current democratic governments look more like incoherent patchworks, political gestures that respond to shifting moods, than to deliberate programs. In sum, the political fragmentation of the public has been one of the reasons for the growing ungovernability of contemporary democracies.

Obviously, the perception of past orderly modern democracies in which individuals vote for parties that aggregate their views and interests, bringing them to bear on parliamentary legislation and government policies, has been largely an idealization or wishful history. But, as I have aimed to show in *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions*,it was the very faith in this largely fictional simplified democratic political process that rendered it partly institutionally and behaviorally embedded. When facts do not sufficiently support a vital democratic “institution” such as the “Public” or the “People,” faith may sometimes compensate by inducing a behavior that fills up the vacuum. For skeptics who doubt the power of faith and fictions to generate institutions, rituals, behavior, and a shared “reality”—the record of centuries of religious faiths that produced sustainable authorities, institutions, rituals and behavior should provide compelling evidence.

Hobbes’ insight that men “stand in awe of their own imaginations…making the creatures of their own fancy, their Gods”[[225]](#footnote-225) is applicable to both religion and democratic politics; to both theocracies and democracies. Hence, when democratic citizens imagine themselves collectively as “the public” and, following the emergence of this abstraction, they perform it in their discourse and institutions, it actually becomes embodied as a political entity. In such case we may say, with Hobbes, that men are making the “public” as “a creature of their own fancy.” Except that the public as a democratic fancy is a serious consequential political “entity.” Correspondingly, when a collective imaginary of the public disintegrates, it also sweeps away its role or status as a significant political factor.

The modern secularization of many—particularly Western—societies, both dramatized the decline of the regulatory hegemony of religious imaginaries[[226]](#footnote-226) and created a space for the emergence of other alternative hegemonic, basically secular, regulatory imaginaries like that of liberal-democracy, as well as secular homogenous nationalism. Now, with the decay of modern liberal-democratic imaginaries, we are witnessing how detached components of these democratic imaginaries survive in undemocratic political reconfigurations of regimes, such as populist nationalist authoritarianism. In such cases, the notion that “The People” as a rhetorical figure is the direct source of leaders’ legitimacy coexists with the absence of the institutions that channel and frame popular values and priorities in democratic regimes.

A further blow to the perception of political causality in modern democracy has been dealt by the declining luster of science in contemporary societies and, consequently, by the diminishing influence of the metaphorical deployment of quasi-scientific notions of causality in politics. I have previously indicated that in the seventeenth century, science and modern democracy were closely related to the rise of autonomous Nature and the replacement of top-down hierarchical divine imaginaries of the world and the social order by alternative modes of causation in both the physical and the political worlds. Because of the strong historical affinity between science and democracy,[[227]](#footnote-227) and due to the impact of the epistemology and culture of modern science on those of democratic politics, the current crisis in the hegemonic status of the modern Nature/Culture dualistic cosmology has significantly weakened laypeople hopes that science, as a human enterprise, could yield an ultimate picture of reality as a safe apolitical reference.

Whereas science has reached in our time its highest level of achievements by its own standards, it has, ironically, also reached rock bottom in terms of social trust and authority in the West. Scientists and experts suffer from widespread disrespect and resentment. These shifts in attitude relate to the association of knowledge with elitism and to an increasing identification of democracy with the dignity of uneducated lay people and to public opinion immune to persuasion based upon public facts and knowledge-based attributions of political causality. We are living in a time afflicted by a “charisma of ignorance”[[228]](#footnote-228)— the view that to be proudly ignorant is more spontaneous and authentic.

The more the democratic political world has become demographically, ethnically, religiously, culturally, economically and politically fragmented, the more former democratic norms have eroded. Such a political world lacked the relative uniformity and coherence of “given Nature” as a reliable Archimedean point and an intelligible,[[229]](#footnote-229) validating reference for scientists as well as—in its common sense version—for objective facts and political causes discernable by lay citizens. A coherent system—which metaphysics and secularized foundational imaginaries of monotheism had lent to modern science[[230]](#footnote-230) and its metaphorical transfer to society as “a system,” as well as to democratic political culture — has been basically lost.

**Chapter 14**

**The Loss of Self-Evident Public Facts and the Crisis of the Common-Sense Conceptions of Reality**

The fragmentation of political causality was both a reinforcing cause and an effect of the simultaneous growing contemporary social distrust of "public facts" in politics and beyond—a process closely connected with the removal of the "world," of "Nature," as a "safe" external object and referent. Historically, scientific facts were certifiable by a complex of very specific hegemonic theories, methodologies, multiple disciplined observations, experimentation and replications. Most importantly, the status and currency of facts rested on a complex culture of trust within the scientific community and its spillover effects in social discourse and politics. Historians of science and its relations to politics—such as Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer—have shown the many interconnected layers of experimental scientific practice, visual imagining and linguistic techniques that have conditioned the rise and authority of the scientific fact and claims of facts in the socio-political context since the seventeenth century. [[231]](#footnote-231) Without recapitulating the details of this history, it is important to reiterate some key features in the rise of the modern fact in order to appreciate the legacy of the seventeenth-century scientific and political revolutions and assess which elements of this legacy, in fact, have been falling apart in our time due to the erosion of the modern dualistic cosmology and its repercussions.

The history of the practices of the Royal Society of London during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the evolution of experimental science, as reflected, for instance, in the pioneering works of Robert Boyle, whose work’s other aspects were referred to above. Boyle, as it was shortly mentioned, performed his experiments before a selection of what he considered a "reliable" group of witnesses. What rendered Boyles' witnesses reliable in the late seventeenth century was their status as gentlemen who were supposed to be humble or modest, independent and free to judge what they saw. Boyle insisted that the gentlemen in his laboratory were not people driven by passions or interests. That in the time of Boyle these virtues were attributed to the gentleman class shows the extent to which the early scientific fact-makers regarded assertions of fact as conditioned by the *social properties of amateur* but—in this period—elite witnesses. Bishop Thomas Sprat, the historian of the early Royal Society of London, also referred to the social properties of nonprofessional witnesses when he observed that they were "sincere witnesses standing by."[[232]](#footnote-232) Eventually, when the self-restrained gentlemen witnesses of Boyle's experiments and the audience of Sprat's Royal Society were replaced by commoners, by lay unselected public witnesses, their willingness to accept the factual claims of scientists, who inevitably appeared to them as an esoteric elite, became far less assured.

The norms and practices of early experimental members of the Royal Society, such as Boyle, left a powerful legacy for the sociocultural requirements of the public and political validation of the currency of facts in the modern era. These norms can also shed light on what broke down in our period.

Under the powerful influence of the Enlightenment vision, the ideal of the diffusion of knowledge and the assumption of the universal human capacity for rationality steadily weakened the privileged status of elites in the social approval of facts, widening both the community of "reliable" public witnesses and the social composition of the community of scientists, experts, academics and intellectuals as sources of reliable facts. The growing heterogeneity and social engagement of scientific and professional communities has actually increased both the occurrence and public visibility of scientific controversies, but, concurrently, contributed to the declining status of certified or self-evident public facts. When supported by the "power of numbers," of charts and statistical tables,[[233]](#footnote-233) illustrations of machines and technology, scientists and other experts were still able to maintain a measure of influence. Nevertheless, the authority of these privileged fact-definers would not be sustainable for long. It was Thomas Hobbes who actually anticipated a distant future whereby—lacking the tools and authority of experts—claims of facts would be respected mostly by the moral desire for and mutual commitment of laypeople to a shared reality. Hobbes referred to the moral commitment that binds witnesses to confirm each other's testimony of facts:

When two or more men know of one and the same fact, they are said to be CONSCIOUS of it one to another; which is as much as to know it together. And because such are fittest witnesses of the facts of one another or of a third, it was and ever will be reputed a very evil act for any man to speak against his *conscience* or to corrupt or force another to do so. (Emphasis in original)

This moral evil ascribed to the denial of commonly witnessed facts was eventually extended, in some respects, to the shared commonsensical norms of the entire society. With the development of democracy and free press, many modern daily papers insisted on the principle of "separating facts from opinion" and support such norms in public discourse, assuming a public that also respects such norms.

But the future— that is, our present—would experience even the erosion of such commonsensical norms of factual reality and the emergence of what might be regarded as the pathology of an audacious manipulative advance of "fake" news or facts.

Against the backdrop of the Enlightenment and the legacies of the scientific revolution, the contemporary breakdown of the norms of the epistemological system that had sustained facts as sociopolitical currency in modern free societies was bound to shake the foundations of contemporary democracy. A very dramatic political crisis of this kind came about, around 2017, signifying an era described by critics as "post-truth." Such crisis set in when politicians—embarrassed when confronted with contradictory facts presented by experts and investigative journalists who repudiated their claims—did not hesitate to start defending their claims and policies by insisting on what came to be labelled as "alternative facts."[[234]](#footnote-234)

The dramatic eruption of such practices during and following the 2016 election campaign of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States of America has, actually, amounted to the climax of a long process signifying the decline of the modern public fact. Still, the current situation illuminates more clearly the whole process that, for long, has often been concealed or unconscious. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* quoted Professor Sam Wineburg, a leading author and founder of the SHEG (Stanford History Education Group) at the Stanford Graduate School of Education who noticed "a dismaying inability by students to reason information they see on the internet. Students, for example, had a hard time distinguishing advertisements from news articles or identifying where information came from… Many students did not cite authorship or article sponsorship or key reasons for not believing an article" (Op-Ed, January 11 2017). Such deficiencies reflect years of massive exposure to visual media and the internet without undergoing prior training in critical television viewing and internet reading, or even developing simple skills in understanding texts. Needless to say, habits stemming from considerable uncritical exposure to mass-media heavily contribute to the vulnerability to practices of what has been labeled as "post-truth" and "alternative facts."[[235]](#footnote-235) Moreover, beyond the boundaries of critical culture, the sheer publicity, the public sharing of alternative or fake facts tends to make them real, inasmuch as the public sharing of warrantable facts. *Publicity* in democracy is one of the most significant and misleading ingredients of the citizen sense of reality.

Again, what has been unveiled is the impact of the disengagement of socio-political discourse from the formerly solid references to public facts, a phenomenon stemming from the effect of the cosmological removal of the world as a safe guarantor of constraints imposed by given Nature, on public factual reality and on human desires. Many newspapers and electronic media with a reputable record of respect for facts have voiced editors, authors and journalists' outrage in the face of the new massive shameless disregard for evidence. The *Economist* devoted (on September 10, 2016) a large space to discussing the "Art of the Lie": "Mr. Trump is the leading exponent of 'post-truth' politics— a reliance on assertions that 'feel true' but have no basis in fact." It continued to assert that *The Economist* was a newspaper which "believe[s] that politics should be based on evidence." In the political context, the problem arises when the phrase or claim of "alternative facts" is part of a rhetorical strategy that consciously violates the conditions and conventions which support common-sense notions of facts in order to deceive, rather than enable persuasion in the context of democratic political discourse.

The acceptability of what "feels true" is, obviously, less demanding than that which is supported by factual evidence and is more socially inclusive. It is such an inherently anti-elitist attitude that has cultivated the "charisma of ignorance," the "democratic" claim that feelings are a better guide in politics than reason. Feeling is perceived as a more equitable human capability than reason, one that does not require education or knowledge. In many cases, feelings might be a good political guide but as a basis of wholesale negation of evidence, they are likely to be disastrous. The multiplicity of news' sources, some of which economically thrive on rumors, gossip and lies, confounds citizens and weakens their capacity to tell facts from fictions. In a relatively early diffusion research of fake news, a group of social scientists compared the spread of verified true and false news stories distributed on Twitter from 2006 to 2017. The data comprised 126,000 stories twitted by three million people. The researchers classified news as true or false drawing on information from six independent fact-checking organizations. They exhibited a 95% to 98% agreement on the classifications. They found that the false news diffused significantly faster, farther, deeper and more broadly than the true ones in all categories of information. The researchers also suggested that the greater speed whereby false news spread might relate to their tendency to be more novel and induce more fear and surprise than fact-based genuine ones.[[236]](#footnote-236)

Social psychologists have pointed out, a long time ago, that shared lies assume the appearance of reality. Given the capacity, and often the motivation of some mass-media to diffuse "fake news" in contemporary democracies, distorted imaginaries of reality may easily become a dangerous basis for voting behavior and public policy making. Groundless attitudes and policies do not necessarily lend themselves to a self-correction that comes from monitoring and assessing experience.

As American historian Gordon Wood has indicated (see Chapter 5 in this book), when people lose their confidence in grasping why political actors act in certain ways, and in how to account for the frequent gaps between purported motives and visible effects—conspiracy theories of politics flourish. Wood points to the pervasiveness of conspiracy theories in the early politics of the founding fathers,[[237]](#footnote-237) and James Sterling Young has shown the persistence of such particularly laypeople accounts of politics throughout American political history.[[238]](#footnote-238) Wood suggests that the conspiracy theories of politics declined in America from about the 1840s, under the increasing influence of the emerging social sciences that introduced concepts of impersonal social and political processes.[[239]](#footnote-239) Against this background, it can be stated that the use of fake news and the spread of conspiracy theories in the age of Trump is not entirely new, but its scope and influence might be unprecedented. It confirms the idea that throughout a crisis of common sense, whereby people lose their ability to make sense of political claims and events, social and political conspiracies that become salient in one period and dormant in another may rise and flourish again. Also in the United Kingdom, a frequent use of fake news was evident during the campaign around the referendum on whether to break membership with the European Union (Brexit). In current authoritarian states such as Poland, Hungary, Russia, China and Turkey, the syndrome of fake news and alternative facts is rampant, both as part of official government policy and of the usually controlled media. In such states, strong government controls and repressive censorship are imposed on the very institutions that—in a free society—characteristically produce "antibodies" against the spread of false beliefs that sever the grounds of factual evidence in social and public discourse. The general public and policy-makers lose their freedom and authority, and their society is condemned to live detached from commonsense reality.

Particularly, when the source is the government itself, fake news and alternative facts are intended to gloss over or eclipse harsh facts and discouraging news. Actually, all governments seek to paint a positive, rather than a pessimistic picture of reality. It has been the expected role of independent media and the institutions listed above to counteract the political idealization of reality by a critical assessment which does not efface failures, harsh facts and imminent threats. The habitual desire of lay publics for good news and edifying beliefs usually suffices to render critical press unpopular, even a source of resentment.

In a democracy such as the United States of America, the opportunity for the systematic distortion of evidence has been magnified, during recent decades, by the breakdown of a shared public conception of reality, a crisis of "common sense"— the epistemological arena of democratic politics, or what we have regarded as the erosion of the epistemological constitution of the regime. It is worth repeating here that many Americans are harking back to the 1960s, to the authority of the CBS news icon "most trusted man in America." In contemporary Israel, a similar nostalgia is often expressed for the "tribal fire," for an earlier time when Israel had just one television channel. Obviously, such single authoritative news source is unthinkable today. "The Fourth Estate" which consists, in our time of a multiplicity of news sources like newspapers, [magazines](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/magazine), [television](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/television), [radio](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/radio) [stations](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/station) and social media which often compete for audience attention by refraining from alienating them by harsh descriptions of reality, tend to resort to entertainment, happy fake news and "alternative facts". Under the Netanyahu government several media were explicitly devoted to sing his praise, where others more neutral and even critical have been fighting for survival in the face of aggressive politicized regulators.[[240]](#footnote-240) Fake news or alternative facts currently reflect a dramatic and conscious culmination of the break with the commitment—to borrow the *New York Times'* slogan—"to separate facts from opinions". Given the spread of fake news in recent years, the *NYT* and other papers have been campaigning for new subscribers by repeating the commitment, "now more essential than ever, to be truthful and strictly adhere to facts" (*NYT*, July 14, 2017).

Democratic journalism faces, indeed, an inherent difficulty in separating facts from opinions, because currently it has become widely understood that facts forever presuppose tacit opinions about what is relevant and which parts out of the ocean of human experience should be selected to be defined and treated as facts. Following many decades of exposure to television, movies and science- fiction, and the multiplicity of news' sources, some of which thrive on rumors, gossip and lies, confound citizens and harden their capacity to tell facts from contrived illusions.

Ironically, this lay indiscrimination between facts and fictions may reveal a deeper intuition regarding the central role played by the unconscious collective imagination in fixing such categories as "reality," "nature" and "freedom". Since the roots of external public facts presuppose the externality of the physical world as an object, "facts" come to embody layers of tacit or unconscious macro and micro-consensus on the implications of the "givenness" of the world as an autonomous entity. For instance, the capacity of criminal law to generate indictments against particular individuals implies the existence of autonomous responsible individuals capable of considered voluntary human choices and actions, as distinguished from individuals whose decisions and actions are driven by more strictly naturalized physical, chemical or neurological causes uncontrolled by a supposedly autonomous mind.

Insanity characteristically limits the applicability of criminal law to human beings assumed to be driven by such involuntary natural forces. By contrast to practices in Antiquity, we do not incriminate animals for killing human beings or damaging property. Obviously, what stands at the root of the separation of Man from Nature is the modern cosmological foundational Nature/Culture dichotomy, extensively discussed above, that created a space for voluntary human action. The assertion or the fact that x is responsible for killing y is, then, at the end of a chain of derivatives from the modern dualistic cosmology, from the space of human judgment, independent of or stronger than deterministic natural impulses.

The reason that it has been possible to separate facts from opinions is, therefore, the institutionalization of the separation of man and the world at the level of modern common sense. I argue that the deterioration of that modern common sense, has unsettled common basic human arena of voluntary political actions as part of discernable political causes and effects. To paraphrase Hobbes' well-known observation that belief in God is a belief in other people, I propose that also belief in facts is a belief in other people, in the sense that both God and the world of facts are abstract entities that arise from particular forms of social faiths in other people's testimonies of revelation and witnessing. Hence, as the history of modernity and the history of science respectively suggest, we should partly seek the explanations for the rise and decline of social concepts of truth and power in changes of patterns of social and political interactions and conversations.[[241]](#footnote-241)

In many respects, the disruptive potential effects of gaps between worldviews that lead to different notions and interpretations of "reality," the extent to which such gaps disrupt the common discourse, are a matter of degree. A borderline case is the recorded world of Donald Trump's supporters by Arlie Hochschild in her book *Strangers in their Own Land*.[[242]](#footnote-242) The shocking reaction of mainstream America to Trump's election to the presidency and the profile of his persistent supporters—rendered by Hochschild—may suggest the existence of a cultural-political subuniverse governed by values and conventions of evidence and truth of a large minority. She argues that unlike the movements pointed out by historian Richard Hofstadter, "[t]rhough the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, movements rose against secularism, modernity, racial integration and a culture of experts. None before the Tea Party have so forcefully taken up the twin causes of reversing progressive reform and dismantling the federal government." She further maintains that blue-collar Southern men, the core supporters of Trump, were uniformly "against abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, race," and for "guns and the Confederate flag."[[243]](#footnote-243) She regards the Trump group as people who gather around a totem. The degree of deviation from common discourse in the American democracy, in this case, is striking. It may amount to alternative common sense competing with the existing one.

The commonsensical world of modern democracy and the public discourse it enables, are not usually disturbed by marginal deviations from standard concepts of facts, which lead to political negotiations between opposing groups or interests. In some way, the ability to contain such difference may indicate the social acceptability of a deeper pluralism. Moreover, there are acceptable differences that reflect different institutional and professional perspectives. Thus, criminal courts, physics, engineering and politics are run by different rules and conventions of evidence.

To remediate the present crisis in contemporary, post-modern common-sense as a cultural frame of democratic politics, requires an awareness of the radically declining impact of science and enlightenment norms of discourse on current postmodern—compared to the former modern—common-sense. It means recognizing that what can be considered as *common* in contemporary common-sense is still open enough to require a spontaneous renegotiation between several local cognitive and epistemological conventions attached to diverse normative perspectives. Perhaps the most difficult problem lies in persuading contemporary publics that they are the ultimate invisible and unconscious source of the authority to define political causes and facts, and that this awareness need not diminish, within each polity, the power of claims of causality and factuality to settle disputes and guide behavior. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was keenly aware of the fact that

the people, who pay for all the faults of the chiefs, ought to have the right to renounce their dependence. . . .But the . . . infinite disorder that this dangerous power would necessarily entail demonstrate more than anything else how much human governments needed a basis more solid than reason alone, and how necessary it was for public repose that divine will intervened to give sovereign authority a sacred and inviolable character.[[244]](#footnote-244)

For thousands of years, Western publics had put their trust in and subordinated much of their conduct to entities considered to embody superhuman transcendental powers and authorities. To attribute now the cause of their mode of existence to *themselves* as collectives and individuals would be nothing short of a monumental cultural-psychological reversal, a kind of Copernican Revolution that would shift the source of the created political universe from external, even transcendental cause to us, anchoring the movement of the human universe in humanity itself. Hints of this grand reversal may be found in the works of contemporary philosophers, scholars, poets, artists, writers and filmmakers. It is clearly too early to estimate if and when they will assemble and carry enough weight to generate new collective political imaginaries of democratic modes of existence.

**Chapter 15**

**The Decay of the Epistemological Norm of Political Visibility**

The visibility of the world as object has been one of the principal features of modern culture. Trust in human vision as a source of information and a basis for claims about the factual world followed the emancipation of the human eye from the chains imposed on it during the Catholic Middle Ages. As I have thoroughly discussed this process, as well as the evolution of democratic visual culture and its decline since late modernity in my former books, in the present discussion I am briefly considering the massive current loss of trust in vision. This phenomenon is assessed as part of the breakdown of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy, and concomitantly unfolding in the earlier discussion on the current disintegration of public perceptions of democratic political causality and public facts. In many respects, lay visual perceptions of causality and facts were always, to some extent, dependent upon beliefs in their existence, because visibility of political power, political causality and public facts have always been elusive and largely virtual. Nevertheless, the current wide awareness of the unreliability of such perceptions spreads distrust and skepticism that undermine the necessary fictions and rituals that have sustained claims of visibility and transparency as necessary components of democratic regimes.

The complexities of vision as a source of knowledge and information about the physical and social worlds were usually concealed behind a facade of a kind of "visual common sense"—a presumption that yields shared conceptions of a valid or false reality. Einstein invited laypeople to recognize that the logical basis of science "departs more and more from the facts of experience."[[245]](#footnote-245) Actually, shared beliefs usually precede and condition shared seeing and a shared conception of reality.[[246]](#footnote-246) During the reign of modernity, people were trained to believe that the act of seeing consists of the imprint of the external world on human eyes. This conception was related, of course, to the status of the collective imaginary of the world as "a picture"[[247]](#footnote-247) as an independent object.

Only later have people come to increasingly realize that the human eye is not a mere recipient of images of objects from the external world but also— in tandem with the human brain and the sociocultural context—actively partakes in the very shaping of what is seen. Clearly, such social production of a common-sense imaginary of reality has been fundamental to human daily—including political—communication. Albert Einstein held that physics attempts "to grasp reality as it is thought independently of its being observed." This attitude actually meant objecting to the relevance and authority of science in common human imaginaries of reality, undermining one of the central tenets or myths of modern common sense. Confirming the inadequacy of scientific concepts of reality as terms of social and political communication, he criticized such social production of imaginaries of reality as the production of false objective facts, of facts which do not belong to the world but to the human social imagination.[[248]](#footnote-248) But given the necessary separation of the imagined socio-political world from the imagined physical world of physics Einstein should have recognized that physical and socio-political facts can be valid in their respective worlds.

Einstein ignores here the distinct and invaluable status of common-sense facts as terms of democratic political discourse. Curiously enough, he was not concerned about protecting common sense as the epistemological territory of participatory democracy, but about shielding the integrity of scientific concepts of reality from the "prejudices" of common sense. Obviously, at least during the better part of the twentieth century, Western publics and a few scientists resisted such a science versus common sense dualistic conception of reality. This is important for understanding why communities of values and beliefs—including scientific and lay ones—respectively produce different visions of reality which, in some respects, weaken the social status of both. Within the polity, this fact has hampered the powers of perceptual minorities to resist concepts of facts held by the perceptual majority.[[249]](#footnote-249) Such differences have persisted also on the internet, where communities of faith have been creating discrete channels or sites to perform their diverse perception and conception of confirmed realities. This has clearly resulted from and, in return, also reinforced, the breakdown of shared common-sense references for public discourse and deliberation.

This state of affairs points to a major gap between current epistemic condition and that which was prevalent in the heyday of liberal democracies. If, in the past, some versions of *shared* reality could be an unconscious habit, in our time we habitually perform and experience a *multiplicity* of either conscious or unconscious rarely discriminated virtual realities. So, contrary to the expectations that innovations in technologies of communications and visualization will standardize the experience of reality across the various parts of the public, solidifying a public digital *agora,* these innovations both reflect and contribute to the deepening of significant diversities of cultural, religious, ideological and gender visual perspectives and identities. By contrast to the medieval elevation of spiritual vision while profoundly distrusting the eye of flesh as a source of knowledge of the world, in our time of visual disarray the human eye has gained the power to both lead us nowhere and in combination with our imagination to orient us in the direction of unrenowned lands beyond our current horizon.

**Chapter 16**

**The fall of Objectivity and Objectification**

Closely related to the elusiveness of political causality, to the distrust in the reliability of supposedly public facts, to the invisibility of political power and of government, is the massive discrediting of claims of objectivity. In many respects, this development has deeply weakened the social authority of all the professional communities and institutions—including governments— which have heavily resorted to professionals in order to seemingly depoliticize decisions and empower their legitimacy.[[250]](#footnote-250) Scientists, engineers, economists, statisticians, geographers, and academics have been among the most affected professional communities. I have attempted to show, in earlier chapters, the double role played by the norms of objectivity and the strategy of objectification in both empowering decision-makers at all spheres to elicit the trust of the people they serve, as well as conceal from them the value-political and moral choices latent in each "objective advice." On the positive side, it would have been impossible for a government, a court, a hospital or an airport to function if all the economic and political costs and benefits of policy decisions— some of which concern the necessarily uneven distribution of probable risks for life or the distribution of benefits between age or social groups—were fully transparent.

No government can function in a context whereby every gesture, word, or action is politicized and contested. Objectification has, therefore, served—for better or for worse—to curb the perception of politics latent in governmental policies and actions. Conversely, it is clear that no democracy may function when both critical and marginal policy-decisions are fully overtly objectified. *The ability of governments to balance over-politicization with over-objectification is a very demanding, constant challenge.* Hence, the radical disempowerment of objectification often undermines hard-won balances between the political and the apolitical.

The decline of the norms and strategies concerning objectification relate directly to the removal of the world as an external independent object and as the ultimate grounds for limiting freedom by necessity in human affairs. No wonder that so many of late-modern and current controversies—such as the ones on genetic engineering and conflicts over nation-states attempting to gear the internet to subvert elections—relate to the excessive exploitation of unregulated cyber space under the gloss of "freedom".[[251]](#footnote-251)

One of the difficulties facing democratic governments has been how solidarity is broken when freedom is to be divided between individuals as well as groups. When we realize that excessive uses of freedom are not universal goods; when they actually diminish or constrain the realization of other cherished values such as decency, equality, fairness, civility and the integrity of the democratic discourse, it becomes clear that—particularly in heterogeneous and politically divided societies—the freedom of some implies less freedom for others. In such contexts, objectivity and necessity, backed up by the supposedly given structure of the world, have been a vital source of instrumental and moral restraint.

As such, objectivity, as well as fairness, have become, in the modern democratic states, among the governing norms of legitimate political allocation of freedoms and scarce resources, and the designation of restraints in competitive systems. Inasmuch as regarding Nature, as partly responsible for the ways we are, has enabled the idea of natural rights and the gift of freedom, so has the view of "objective" Nature, the world, as a limit on human freedom, yielded enormous benefits to the making and running of modern democracy. As I have suggested earlier, losing the world, losing the hegemonic imaginary of "objective" Nature as an independent object has, in some respects, amounted to losing the most reliable and safe anchor or compass necessary for navigating science, discourse, and morality. Again, it is comparable, in my opinion, to the loss of God in a religious society. To paraphrase Dostoyevsky's dictum, replacing Nature for God, I would say, that in some sense, "if there is no Nature everything is permitted."

The loss of Nature, the *transcendental of the modern secular democratic society*, is indeed comparable to the former loss of God as the transcendental of the religious society. One may go further and claim that to lose Nature as the twin wing of the Nature/Culture dualism means also the loss of culture as checked by Nature and enacted by the very democratic epistemology that made democracy possible. So we have a chain that starts with the vanishing of the very Nature that had enabled restrained democratic freedom and democratic culture and the loss of the very cultural resources which, among other things, have formerly checked the rise of extremism. Now, with the decline of the "redeeming" mission of science as an authoritative agent of nature, the very claim to know Nature has lost its former sway as an important cultural and philosophical weapon to combat myths and skepticism. This state of affairs has made room for the ascent of arbitrary power and the spread of disbelief.

What, then, could possibly become an acceptable source of authority that might check human desires, passions and fantasies in a human universe in which the will meets neither limits imposed by divinity nor nature? As I indicated earlier, the emergence of Anthropocene has provoked, exactly along the same lines, criticism of the implicit endorsement of unlimited human mastery unchecked by Nature. It has invoked the earlier resistance to technology on a new scale.[[252]](#footnote-252)

Perhaps the most consequential loss of objectivity has taken place in the domain of Law. Democracies have devised powerful methods to establish laws that would replace a politically motivated, arbitrary use of force by a legal authority backed up by restricted legal violence. This role of the law to depoliticize some governmental decisions and some application of force in society, its function to limit politics, has been vital for the maintenance of democratic order. Its erosion is both part of the decline of the whole complex of nature, the world as an object, the authority of science and of the professions. Moreover, erosion of the principle of the *rule of law*, according to which all are equal and accountable before the law, also undermines the very foundation of civic solidarity. When replaced by *rule by law*, arbitrarily formulated (or in opposition to basic human rights) and enforced by the governing authorities on the people, democracy is largely jeopardized. In some democracies, the explicit politicization of the law is regarded as provocation. Israel is a good example. Under the Rule of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu backed up by the most extreme right-wing coalition in Israeli history, consistently seeks to pass laws to promote the legalization of the occupation of the West Bank and undermine the freedom and the financial basis of liberal and left-wing NGOs. Moreover, despite a mixed record that includes consistent support for West-Bank settlers, and despite the fact that, among governmental institutions, the Israeli Supreme Court still receives the most favorable domestic public opinion scores, ministers and members of parliament, including the prime minister, have been systematically and savagely attacking Supreme Court justices, and other law-enforcing agencies.[[253]](#footnote-253) Like their present counterparts in Turkey, Poland and Hungary, and the USA they accuse judges of being unpatriotic left-wingers. Such attacks against courts and judges have been reinforced by declining liberal-democratic beliefs and the rise of fanatic, often violent nationalism in Europe and the United States of America. In Israel, the problem is exacerbated by pragmatic and ideological alliances of right-wing and religious parties, forged since the May 1977 upheaval.[[254]](#footnote-254) Thus, the Israeli political Right combines nationalist and religious justifications for the occupation of the West Bank, eschewing well-established international treaties, based on the notions of human *natural* r*ights*. In this context, the Israeli Supreme Court had to grapple also with the advocates of the superiority of religious over legislated law. All in all, these massive assaults have severely undermined the apolitical authority of the courts and the law. To sum up, the distrust of individual rationality, autonomy and voluntarism; the diminishing belief in the workings and the very discernibility of democratic political chains of causes and effects; the crisis of a shared common-sense conception of factual reality; the widespread discrediting of the visibility of political power and the accountability of governments, as well as the breakdown of the norm of objectivity in the socio-political and legal context—they all have added up to a major assault on the cultural and epistemological culture of modern democracy. At the center we find the empty spot of the democratic citizens who have lost the very equipment, the tools with which to participate in the making of democratic politics and criticize those temporarily mandated to represent them and act on their behalf. Instead, we have an amorphous human entity which, in many respects, is more of a subject than a citizen deprived of the power to make sense of the political system and criticize power. It no longer trusts the visible indicators of his leaders' intentions and actions and does not have sufficient trust in nongovernment professional advice and evaluation of the state of public affairs.

Given this disintegration of the Enlightenment "paradigm" of modern democracy, what could possibly be the next stage? Who are the thinkers, the poets and the artists who could lead our political and social imagination during this transitional period into a new era? What are the resources available in our time for the rhetoric of freedom and democracy, for the formation of new imaginaries of self-governing regimes of justice? Can we learn anything from past radical transformations between cosmologies and cultures? From the radical change that has taken place from the medieval to the modern era?

Part V

DEMOCRACY BEYOND MODERNITY: CAN A SELF-FULLFILLING DEMOCRACY BE IMAGINED IN OUR TIME?[[255]](#footnote-255)

***Introduction***

I have attempted, throughout the book, to concentrate on the rise and fall of modern democratic epistemology and its relation to the artificial democratic political order made and sustained by human beings. I have also aimed to show that the obliteration of God from the scheme of things allowed for the replacement of a vertical top-down by a bottom-up and horizontal human causality. Such gaping void has opened up the path for the rise of human beings *qua* makers—as demonstrated by the American Revolution—as participants, witnesses and spectators of politics whose fabric consists of actual public actions and events. This shift was based on the modern capacity of human beings—mediated by a new epistemology—to perceive distinctions between objective external facts and illusions, such as those contrived under a medieval monistic cosmology by churches and monarchies. In our time, the current loss of Nature as a safe anchor for the epistemological foundations of modern democracy has pushed democracy towards an uncharted future. Deprived of bonds, or even referents that would anchor it to the world, democracy is like a spacecraft lost in space after being disconnected from our planet.

These developments raise the unanswerable question of whether we have lost democracy forever. Are we doomed to inhabit a political universe devoid of perceptible credible causes and effects, a universe bereft of public facts, in which there is no demarcation line between credible visibility and illusions? A world whereby claims of objectivity are bound to appear as rhetorical ploys to conceal subjectivity and arbitrariness? Can democracy exist without citizens that are equipped with categories of "facts," "causes," norms of "objectivity" and other epistemological compasses with which to navigate and partake in democratic politics?

I must confess that I find myself in a quandary. On the one hand, I reject thoroughgoing skepticism as a basis of both public philosophy and civic culture. On the other, the question of how democracy can be saved in a world resting on a secular naturalistic monistic cosmology seems to demand a hardly warrantable optimism.

Still, it may be possible to glean some hopefulness from the historical record since Solon. It shows that the idea of democracy, emerging from the sixth-century BCE, has made a sufficiently powerful impact on humanity to trigger incessant attempts to create political institutions and behaviors that struggle to come close to the ideal of democracy, an ideal that remains, in our time, the universal norm of legitimate power. A contemporary search for alternative ontological and epistemological bases for democracy requires a belief in the possibility of effecting profound changes in lay habits consolidated by a presently waning faith in organized religion or Nature and to give up the comfort of anchoring trust in "safe" external, nonhuman authorities. This poses a great difficulty for the prospect of change hinging on the lay recognition that the human collective imagination has always been—as Giambattista Vico understood[[256]](#footnote-256)—a principal source and cause for the rise and fall of the political. The current crisis of Western democracies significantly complicates the possibility of imagining alternatives that would sufficiently break with the past in order to project radically new beginnings. Furthermore, current democracies in Western nation-states still partly abide by former democratic norms and expectations inspired by the vision of the Enlightenment, whose growing gap with actual practice generates massive pessimism, skepticism and anxiety. The challenges posed by the present transitional period are—important qualifications notwithstanding —comparable to those faced by the transition from the premodern divinely ordered world to the modern.

Such transition involves a cluster of layers of radical, although often gradual, interrelated shifts from medieval monistic to modern dualistic cosmology, from medieval to modern ontology, and from the immanence of God in the world as a given to Nature as a dynamic independent entity. The shift led to an epistemology which negated, for instance, the human perception of spirits, ghosts and supernatural beings. Modern epistemology has acknowledged a domain of human artificial creations separated from both Divinity and Nature, such as the modern political order and the state. We can certainly learn something from the shift from the medieval to the modern world, as discussed, among others, by Keith Thomas,[[257]](#footnote-257) about what is involved in the gradual metamorphosis between cosmologies, this time from the modern to the postmodern world.

So, the first question I wish to raise now is, what can we learn from the experience and the strategies enunciated by modern political theorists, such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau and Vico, who confronted the challenge of imagining and training post-medieval secularizing publics to gradually accept the modern and, later, the democratic human-made state? Secondly, I will examine some of the implications entailed in the conditions and processes underlying the decay of present democracies for the political imagination of future democracies. I will ask, at that point, whether twentieth-century thinkers such as Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Claude Lefort and Bruno Latour, who unearthed the weaknesses of contemporary liberal democracy, also offered important insights into the nature of politics and the place of democratic imaginaries and practices in the future.

The harbingers of early modern political theory, thinkers such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Vico, Rousseau and, later, the Federalists, had to grapple with the consequential shift from God as the transcendental imaginary of the medieval religious state to Nature as the transcendental of the post-medieval secular state. That struggle has fostered—among other things—the consolidation and the engagement of Nature as a source of authority and rules, as a constraint, as a given distinct from the artificial, as an object of knowledge and as a moral standard.

Centuries of dependence upon unquestionable transcendental authority cannot easily switch to trust in conscious or unconscious products of human creations. That shift was, indeed, mediated by a hybrid phase, instantiated in *Vindiciae* *Contra Tyrannos* (adefense of liberty against tyrants), an influential Huguenot tract published in Basel in 1579.[[258]](#footnote-258) This treatise is a good example of the way in which faith in the subordination of human to divine authority was enlisted to open up space for human resistance to earthly tyranny. Following a close interpretation of the relations between God and the Hebrew kings in the Old Testament, it concludes that it is "lawful for the people to resist the king who would overthrow the Law of God and abolish His church."[[259]](#footnote-259) In some way, through the imagined mediation of the dictates of divinity, this procedure of demoting or punishing a tyrant is quasi-democratic. In modern democracies, manmade constitutions, often sanctified by reference to God or nature, have also officiated as supreme law, or as a semi-transcendental check on arbitrary rule.

The right of revolution, also enunciated by John Locke, and the fact that constitutions are ultimately human-made, suggest that in the modern era people were able to gradually realize that *they are the near-ultimate cause of the rise and decline of regimes*. This realization, glossed over—to use Vico's language—by the "heroic period" of post-charismatic and mythologized leaders, founding fathers and constitutive wars, is still considerably distant from a current conscious, intentional, more pragmatic approach to the creation of binding imaginaries and the corresponding institutions of the political order. The distance between the rolling, spontaneous, partly conscious or intuitive process of choosing a new imaginary of political order and the purposeful undertaking of striving for a designed, often revolutionary change, is very significant. The former, which arises from slow changing values, circumstances and cultural evolution, provokes little resistance. The latter is bound to be more forcefully resisted.

So, I will attempt to limit myself, in this last part, to speculating on the kind of circumstances, processes and deliberate strategies that might spark the kind of changes that would set in motion the emergence, in our time, of a self-fulfilling democracy based upon the replacement of increasingly anachronistic metaphysical, cultural, institutional and socio-psychological features of currently decaying democracies by novel imaginaries necessary for the production and diffusion of a radically new political order.

**Chapter 17**

**Early Political Modernizers**

So what can we learn from the early moderns—such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, and Vico—on the resources they sought to enlist for the advancement of their novel respective political visions of legitimate, stable and free regimes? In different ways, all of them were concerned with the problem of how to generate legitimate obedience and a stable political order unguided by God. All of them responded to the conditions and expectations of their time when they aimed to ground obedience on a degree of freedom. As a matter of fact, their respective political creativity resides in the various ways they tried to show how, short of anarchism, obedience becomes inseparable from conditions of freedom. In evolving their solutions to the dilemma of reconciling freedom with obedience, they were mindful of the fact that whereas obedience is a concrete behavior, freedom could be just an imaginary, a frame of mind or even an illusion.[[260]](#footnote-260)

All the above thinkers of the transition period recognized, as well, the difficulties inherent in the attempt to persuade their contemporaries of their respective notions of the good state or stable regime in the absence of a supervising God. In the final analysis, they all felt that the power of classical Quintilian rhetoric had waned as a sufficient tool of persuasion in their time.

The case of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is particularly instructive, since—as Quentin Skinner has shown[[261]](#footnote-261)—whereas in his early writings, Hobbes abided by the rules of *ars rhetorica,* later he would be deeply impressed with the power of Euclidean geometry to produce "demonstrative truths." It was, after all, his contemporary Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who had famously stood his ground against the pressures from the church, arguing that the "demonstrated conclusions touching the things of nature and of the heavens cannot be changed with the same facility as opinions about what is or is not lawful in a contract, bargain, or bill of exchange."[[262]](#footnote-262)

Of course, the truths of Hobbes' civil science did not touch heavenly matters but, rather, affairs of earthy politics, law, power and obedience. He juxtaposed the certainty of mathematics and geometry to the inherent uncertainty of individual reason. Convinced by the persuasive power of early modern science to discard his early rhetorical style, Hobbes emerged as the most prominent early-modern political theorist to be inspired by mathematics, geometry and empirical science as vehicles for demonstrative political truths, while recognizing also the crucial role of the imagination in the shaping of politics. Nevertheless, he came to realize—as Skinner shows—that, in the final analysis, also scientific language was insufficient to sway people's behavior. Fully cognizant of the fact that when it contradicts human interests, passions and the people's imagination, even demonstrable geometrical truth can be defied, he wrote that a geometrical truth will be upheld only as long as it "crosses no man's ambition, profit, or lust."[[263]](#footnote-263)

Hobbes' oscillation between classical rhetoric and scientific persuasion is symptomatic of his transitional position between two cosmologies and cultures. At the end of the day, he decided to yoke both reason and eloquence, both the languages of science and rhetoric, to present systematic proofs, as well as proverbs and metaphors.[[264]](#footnote-264) Skinner quotes Whelan's comment on this tension in Hobbes' approach to his contemporaries, noting that "despite his vociferous polemic against metaphors," Hobbes is "probably the most metaphorical of political philosophers."[[265]](#footnote-265) Like Giambattista Vico, Hobbes admired the sway that poets hold over people. Ultimately, he held that what drives the behavior of people are their political imaginaries, "the creatures of their own fancy."[[266]](#footnote-266) His choice was to trigger and navigate the political imagination of the people combined with logical and legal arguments to buttress the imaginaries of the state of Nature, the social contract and the sovereign. In line with classical rhetoric, Hobbes held, then, that "rhetoric is an art consisting not only in moving the passions … but chiefly in proofs."[[267]](#footnote-267)

His fundamental premise was that "the principles of rhetoric…must derive from the *common opinions* that men have concerning peace and war."[[268]](#footnote-268) This enabled him to present his contemporaries with the stark choice between self-subordination to an artificial sovereign by means of contractual law in return for protection by the state or, alternatively, to fall into the state of Nature dominated by chaos instigated by the combination of unlimited individual freedom and total vulnerability to arbitrary violence, permanent war and a threat of unpredictable death.

Compared with Hobbes, the contents and language of the philosophical writings of Spinoza (1632-1677), including his work on ethics, were not as accessible to laypeople. Spinoza's view on what moves people to believe and obey provides another perspective, according to which the force that moves laypeople is not truth—which is inherently inaccessible to the masses—but, again, the imagination. There are important insights one can derive from Spinoza's interpretation of the Bible. Following his discussion of this issue, he concludes:

It is now, I think, sufficiently clear what persons are bound to believe in the Scripture narratives, and in what degree they are so bound, for … the knowledge of the belief in them is particularly necessary to the masses whose intellect is not capable of perceiving things clearly and distinctly.[[269]](#footnote-269)

In reference to the Hebrew prophets, he observed that "prophets were endowed with unusually vivid imagination and not with unusually perfect minds."[[270]](#footnote-270) The consolation brought to mankind by the Bible was achieved, according to Spinoza, by adapting its content "as far as possible to the understanding of the masses…." This understanding required, according to him, also adaptation to experience.[[271]](#footnote-271) Spinoza clearly relies here on a version of common-sense knowledge inherent in practices of social and political life.

Clearly, in his opinion, faith is more instrumental to instill virtues and obedience in people than reason and truth. Undoubtedly, Spinoza believed in the uses of the human imagination to induce the masses to behave virtuously and with restraint, whereas only the few, in his opinion, could be persuaded by reason. Like Rousseau, who formulated dogmas of civil religion in his *Social Contract*, about a hundred years later, also Spinoza would enumerate

the dogmas of universal faith or the fundamental dogmas of the whole of Scripture, inasmuch as they all tend . . . to this one doctrine, namely, that there exists a God, that is, a Supreme Being, Who loves justice and charity, and Who must be obeyed by whosoever would be saved.[[272]](#footnote-272)

Spinoza emphasizes later the "utility and the need for Holy Scripture or Revelation."[[273]](#footnote-273) He had obviously thought of other individuals—of philosophers— when he singled out those who could approach truth aided by reason, rather than dogmas and stories, and insisted on the invaluable importance of free thought. Granting universal obedience to the state, Spinoza argued that "in fact, the true aim of government is liberty."[[274]](#footnote-274) Freedom depends on obedience to the law and free speech.

Like Pericles in his celebration of Athenian democracy, and Rousseau in his praise of Geneva as a progressive free city, also Spinoza celebrates his city Amsterdam as an example for the virtues of a free city: "The city of Amsterdam reaps the fruit of this freedom in its own great prosperity and in the admiration of all other people. For in this most flourishing state, and most splendid city, men of every nation and religion live together in the greatest harmony."[[275]](#footnote-275) This reference to Amsterdam is another rhetorical resource employed by Spinoza to persuade his contemporaries of the merits of freedom and harmony. But how does this commitment to freedom, obedience, harmony and their diverse rhetorical rationales coexist in Spinoza?

Writing as a dispassionate scientific observer, Spinoza claimed to have "looked upon passions, such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity… not in the light of vices of human nature… but as properties just as pertinent to it as are heat, cold, storm, thunder and the like to the nature of the atmosphere."[[276]](#footnote-276) This analogy—as the style of his book on ethics testifies— bespeaks his respect and resort to the authority of commonsense versions of science, as well as his pragmatic approach to politics. These suggest Spinoza's amalgamation of a quasi-scientific, quasi-religious realistic approach to the problem of harmonizing the means to yoke the behavior of the people with the goals of stability, freedom, and obedience. From a modern perspective, obedience and harmony are not necessarily compatible with freedom.

There is a vast distance between Spinoza's high and abstract language in his philosophical and metaphysical writings and his earthier, pragmatic discourse, which engages his explicitly and implicitly recommended techniques of persuasion in politics. Spinoza is fully cognizant of this disparity. "Applying my mind to politics," Spinoza concludes, "I have resolved to demonstrate by a certain and undoubted course of argument, or to deduce from the very condition of human nature…only such things that agree best with practice."[[277]](#footnote-277) The metaphysical holism of Spinoza accommodates the apparent gap between real politics and high principles.

John Locke's approach to political persuasion is no less influenced by science, no less practical, but is more directly politically pedagogical. Douglas John Casson observes that by "titling his book an essay rather than a treatise, he signals that it is meant to be an accessible work written for a general audience rather than a narrow philosophical tract written for fellow philosophers."[[278]](#footnote-278) The public orientation of Locke (1632-1704) is clearly manifest in his focus on the political pedagogy of civic judgment in the liberal state. Hence, as Casson argues, "his *Essay* in intention and effect is much less a theory of knowledge than it is a theory of opinion. . . . [For him] a measure of any principle is its usefulness or application in the world."[[279]](#footnote-279) His aim is to mitigate the extremes of radical skepticism and fanaticism by introducing a safe basis for lay judgment, compatible with both ongoing public discourse and toleration. Like Hobbes, Locke was concerned that the concept of individual conscience might encourage a dangerous political subjectivity.[[280]](#footnote-280) Both considered that the notion that individual conscience may generate a subjective conviction in absolute truths could lead to violence. Given the rich record of religious wars, Locke warned also of the link between fanaticism— especially religious enthusiasm—and violence.

Locke's attempt to find a middle ground compatible with civic life led him to emphasize two principles: empiricism and probability, both enlisting science and the culture of science at the time to moderate politics by way of balanced human judgment. Against "Robert Filmer's scriptural history of political power," Locke provides "one that is more factual, more readily observable, and more obviously compatible with the available evidence," writes Casson.[[281]](#footnote-281)

Locke's empiricism is based upon the fundamental place of sensations and observations in his epistemology and on his strong objections to Cartesian innate ideas, to claims of absolute certainty, endorsing, instead, calculable probability as a principle of civic judgment. *Probability against certainty* was, for Locke, a basis for judgment ever open to debate without closure, to the possibility of convergence of probable judgments of different people that potentially produce civic agreement, and to tolerance of opposing views. All the above have been key elements of modern democratic culture and reasons for the delegitimation of violence.

Locke's labor theory of property—the individual appropriation of the fruits of one's own labor—owning the imprints a person makes on matter, is another aspect of his materialism. Besides fueling early-modern capitalism, this theory of property undoubtedly played a major role in the popularity of Locke in the West and, consequently, also in broadcasting his probabilistic theory of civic judgment.

Like Spinoza and Hobbes, also Locke integrated a concept of Nature into his theories and political rhetoric, enlisting "probable signs of Nature" to his art of persuading laypeople. In all three cases, although more deeply latent in Hobbes, Nature and natural laws carry the force and the immanent authority of God, of divinity, often revealed through natural reason, the voice of God in man. This separation between a "trans-human," later considered secular Nature, and human beings, expresses elements of the modern dualistic cosmology that gave rise to both modern science and democracy.

The awareness to the limits of human knowledge has reinforced the urge of these thinkers to rely on what they perceived as self-evident natural laws, recognized by natural reason, experience and—for Locke and Hume—also by tradition or habit. These laws were meant to serve human self-preservation, justice and peace, considered to be supreme divine purposes compatible with human interests. Such interpretations of natural laws and claims about the divine empowerment of man to recognize God's intentions were bound to elicit a deep echo among Christians. The rhetoric of Locke, a religious Christian, combines, then, religion, natural laws, sense experience, science, principles of probability, reason, and the connection between property and labor.

The approach of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) to politics and the rhetoric of his principal publication *Scienza Nuova* was boldly innovative and surrounded by paradox. Vico suggested that regimes rise and fall as a result of the impact made by historical shifts on the people's collective political imagination. When the popular imagination of the socio-political order is hegemonic in a particular society, it generates institutions and behaviors compatible with its content—be it monarchic, aristocratic or democratic. But his elevation of the collective people's imagination as a political-historical force was inevitably challenging, even provocative, to his contemporaries in the age of the Enlightenment and the cult of reason. This provocation, initially sustained by marginalizing indifference, was later energized by liberal-democratic resistance to Vico well into the twentieth century, when his ideas were embraced by fascist political thinkers and leaders.[[282]](#footnote-282)

Only with the waning of the Enlightenment has Vico increasingly gained support from social and political scientists, who came to appreciate the role of the political imagination in creating political facts and institutions. Scholars have begun to acknowledge that it is from Vico that we can learn to understand the configuration of political regimes as embodying a popular poetic logic that allows the masses to indirectly approach and internalize inaccessible abstract concepts by means of political imaginaries: "Vico— argues David Marshall —clearly understood the imagination as a preconceptual domain sustained by highly charged effects."[[283]](#footnote-283)

Vico tends to address the collective rather than the individual. Marshall further points out that "dialogical values are precisely what Vico did not take from classical rhetoric. In Vico, discourse is almost always anonymous . . . culture is the matrix for diffused politics."[[284]](#footnote-284) Inasmuch as the imaginaries of the public and the *agora* undergo changes, political discourse must adapt accordingly. Marshall maintains that in the case of Vico, it meant the "depersonalization of political speech," as well as the mediation of rhetoric through its 'institutionalization' as communication."[[285]](#footnote-285) Vico believed in the power of creative poetic language to have an impact in the realm of common sense, in the realm of a community that shares sensations and judgments, habitually and unreflectively. Following Vico's time, impersonal mass- communication has eventually emancipated itself from the structural legacy of classical rhetoric and embarked upon the era of mass-politics and its special political features.

The extraordinary powers of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s rhetoric were amply made manifest in the adoption of some of his political expressions on freedom and equality as slogans of the French Revolution. Both the rhetorical assets and the impact of Rousseau (1712-1778) on his contemporaries and later generations must be assessed in light of the vast scope and diversity of his writings: Rousseau wrote, perhaps, the most influential modern text on education; an important philosophical–anthropological text on the genealogy of man; an essay on the origins of language, the modern state and sovereignty; a political-semi-anthropological text on the origins of inequality; important publications on music and music criticism, as well as on the arts; an autobiography which played a major role in the rise of modern individualism; narrative (allegorical) fiction; an important contribution to Diderot's [*Encyclopédie*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclop%C3%A9die). His *oeuvres* include further invaluable correspondence with other philosophers and many other important texts. Obviously, no full appreciation of Rousseau's rhetoric and impact can encompass the entire body of his works. My purpose here is much humbler. I shall concentrate on his attempts at persuasion as manifested mainly in a selection from his most important political texts, while occasionally referring to other works when relevant to my specific argument.

Perhaps most significantly, Rousseau both builds on the dualistic modern cosmology sharply separating Nature and Culture, Nature and civilization, and develops its implications— among other things—for politics, education, and morality. This modern dualistic cosmology underlies Rousseau's separation between animals and human beings, primitive human beings imprisoned in unchanging Nature; civilized human beings able to transcend Nature and achieve freedom, premodern ahistorical men and civilized human beings who have history and may strive to achieve progress and perfectibility. Also in Rousseau's educational work *Emile*,the opposition between Nature and society is very evident. Actually, he alludes to the difference in his pedagogy, teaching the child that objective Nature is not as malleable or moveable as his mother, that Nature imposes constraints on the human will. The encounter with an unmovable rock, with an object of Nature, becomes an instruction on the limits of the child's will and power, a lesson in the need to respect objective limitations.

Rousseau was deeply aware that his conceptions of Nature and history are imaginaries, kinds of "necessary fictions." Jean Starobinski observes that not only does Rousseau go as far as to suggest that “the state of Nature perhaps never has existed, and probably never will" (in a passage of the *Second Discourse)* but also that "it is a mere speculation, the starting point of ‘hypothetical history,’ a principle from which certain conclusions can be deduced in an attempt to establish a chain of causes and effects, to construct a genetic explanation of the world as it appears to us." This procedure, Starobinski continues, "is not different from that used by nearly all scientists and philosophers in this period . . . In bestowing upon speculation the name of *observation,* they hoped to be dispensed from the need to provide further proof."[[286]](#footnote-286) The notion that nature is merely an imaginary is perfectly compatible with the idea that cosmology is the foundational imaginary of the system. Equating speculation with observation is, therefore, one of the examples for how a fiction of nature and a hypothetical or "speculative history" could combine, in Rousseau, to generate a quasi-scientifically-encompassing, rhetorically compelling imaginary of the world.

It is important to note here that this short description of Rousseau's approach already contains three principles of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy discussed in former chapters: an accessible narrative of "causality," a claim of "public facts" and of "observable" evidence.

In a significant deviation from the Enlightenment's cult of reason, Rousseau's democratic appeal has been enhanced by his repeated privileging of feeling over reason.[[287]](#footnote-287) Another aspect of Rousseau's popular allure relates to his sophisticated play on the tensions between inside and outside, between honesty, reality and theatricality, the truthful "natural man" and the social external man. Also in his epistolary *La nouvelle Héloïse*(Julie, or the New Heloise)*,* transparency is elevated in the education of children and intimate relations. Equality of worth is, of course, another appealing value granting individuals the reassurance that no others are "naturally" superior. Transparency and equality hold, then, a very special power in Rousseau's thought as resources of self-fashioning and socio-political criticism.

In Chapter VIII of the *Social Contract*, entitled "Civil Religion," Rousseau gives an explicit expression to his view on the role of the imagination in shaping democratic citizenship. The analogy to the role of the imagination in religion is very telling. It suggests that the difference between politics and religion is in the content—not in the fact of faith or belief—as well as in the use of contrived imaginaries. In both systems, specific beliefs generate specific modes of existence, including languages, institutions, codes of behavior and, most importantly, meanings. Rousseau refers here to "social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen." The content of what he calls "the principles of civic faith" reflect some of the common beliefs in Rousseau's society. They are, therefore, closely analogous to religious dogmas. He asserts:

The dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary. The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity . . . the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas. Its negative dogmas, I confine to one: intolerance, which is a part of the cults we have rejected.[[288]](#footnote-288)

Basically, Rousseau offers here a secularized version of religious dogmas which suggests his admiration for the efficacy of religious rhetoric. It is safe to speculate that had Rousseau enunciated the necessary dogmas, the principles of civic faith required for contemporary democratic citizenship, the elementary principle of democratic epistemology befitting our own time would have been radically different. Among other things, it could have reflected a widespread secularism, as well as the recognition of large religious communities that should find their place within such civic religion. Further, he would have had to grapple with the need to restore public faith in the reality of public facts and the possibility of objectivity in legal, professional and public policy judgments. Rousseau's insistence that the message of civil religion be economical, simple and exactly worded would not have shamed any contemporary communication or public-relations expert. It suggests his keen awareness and focus on rhetorical efficacy that will persuade the larger unphilosophical audience, which counts so heavily in democratic politics. Like Spinoza, Rousseau distinguishes between addressing his fellow philosophers and the lay public.

Paul de Man's close reading of the *Social Contract* and the *Essay on the Origins of Inequality* has yielded further insight into the magnetic rhetorical power of Rousseau's writings. I understand de Man as noting that in the *Social Contract*, the ambiguous separation between the constative and performative dimensions of the social contract as a constitution allows for its ideal depiction to sanction the democratic state while hiding the costs of its performativity as an applied power system. It blurs the distinction between "the constitutional prescription and the political action implied in its execution… between the exhilarating feeling inspired by the firm promise" manifested in the text of the *Social Contract*, and the toll taken by the power applied to its enforcement.[[289]](#footnote-289)

De Man adds, "No grammar is conceivable without the suspension of referential meaning, just as law can never be written unless one suspends any consideration of applicability to a particular entity."[[290]](#footnote-290) In another place, de Man comments that "[i]t is the generality of the legal text which ruthlessly rejects any particularization, which allows for the possibility of its coming into being."[[291]](#footnote-291) That is why he argues that the incompatibility between the cheerful expectations raised by the idealized linguistic articulation of the social contract and its application by a sovereign power constitutes an act of deceit. This observation recalls the point made by Walter Benjamin (quoted in Chapter 11 of this book) that "in the exercise of violence over life and death more than in any other legal act, law reaffirms itself"; violence is part of both "law making and law preserving."

The democratic state constituted by the social contract seems to embody all the citizens, but the power they yield and its ramifications, as the historical record indicates, can turn the government against them.

The point is that as a text, as a prescriptive construct, the constitutional structure is meant to generate events. This gap between a statement about a constitutional structure and events allows for the incongruity between them. De Man does not blame Rousseau for this deceit, observing that this gap results as a consequence of the way language operates rather than as an intended deception. Nevertheless, in fact, it empowers the rhetoric of the *Social Contract*. Albeit in a different way, the gap between language and political effects in the work of Rousseau is discernable also in his famous assertion that "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains," regarded by Rousseau's bashers—mainly by Alexander Herzen and Conor Cruise O'Brien—as "idiotic." Obviously, every newborn baby is totally dependent on adult care. But Rousseau was devising here a politically effective, really ingenious trope of political rhetoric that loses its purpose and power when read literally. Here—by contrast to the gap between the idealized social contract and the coercive and destructive implications of its application to particular people—the idealized metaphorical description of freedom as a birthright is intended to be instrumental, in order to dramatize the need to protect a not-yet-achieved budding freedom. Defying anthropological or psychological doubts regarding the roots of freedom, it meant to convince people that they were being robbed by the government of the most precious inborn asset of freedom as a gift of nature. Like the fictions or "dogmas" of Rousseau's civil religion unfolded at the end of his *Social Contract*, the faith in the origin of freedom with birth was intended to reinforce civic suspicion in and resistance to any government that enslaves its citizens.

The clearest example of a self-fulfilling, self-made, modern democracy is, of course, the American. In some sense, all democracies require a measure of conscious or intuitive effort to create a political system approximating the ideal of self-government responsive to the voice and needs of the "people." But the combination of circumstances that enabled the American Revolution (1760-1791) were especially unique. The growing antagonism between the settlers of the American continent and the British rule of the colonies; the profound gaps between the life conditions in the colonies and the possibilities opened up in the huge continent facilitated the eventual break with many of the traditions and habits of the "mother country" and, eventually, with Europe itself. Still, apart from the antagonisms toward, and the widening discontinuity with, England, what could have remained the latter's political legacy?

This struggle for freedom leading to the American Revolutionary War radicalized the political imagination of the founding fathers, striving, in the famous words of Thomas Paine, "to begin the world anew."[[292]](#footnote-292) Fueled by a mixture of religious zeal[[293]](#footnote-293) and secular instrumentalism[[294]](#footnote-294)—both inspired by visions of the Enlightenment—the founding fathers aspired to "recast the world of power" and restructure public authority.[[295]](#footnote-295) The *Federalist Papers* demonstrate their ingenuous capacity to work out a synthesis between liberal democratic idealism, constitutional wisdom and pragmatic political realism.

Much of the founding fathers' achievement derived from their deep trust in the promise of science and its impact on public enlightenment and politics. Thomas Jefferson argued that "since truth and reason have maintained their grounds against false opinions in league with false facts, the press, confined to truth, needs no other legal restraint; the public judgment will correct false reasoning and opinions."[[296]](#footnote-296) Despite the core of persisting racist attitudes towards Afro- and Native Americans during the Revolution and the war,[[297]](#footnote-297) the need to form a "common ground" and foment an inclusive solidarity that would tilt the scales in America's favor in the War of Independence waged against England consolidated the Americans around a commitment to democracy.

Overarching the American case has spanned, of course, the modern dualistic cosmological imaginary that has separated Nature from Culture, world from humans, granting autonomy to both. The separation of nature and culture has, nevertheless, to be qualified in the American case by the vision of the primordial nature of the Continent as a God-given free *terra incognita* for the American enterprise.[[298]](#footnote-298) It was the coexistence of an "objective world" and voluntary human beings that opened up the way for the political creativity displayed so dramatically in the emergence of the American democracy, as well as in the rise of modern science and the epistemological constitution of modern democracy.

Eventually, the voluntary pole of the dualism enlisted science to an ideology of mastery over Nature, launching a shift that would accelerate the move to a new monism which would gradually replace the stark dichotomy of man and Nature. I have argued that the cosmological dualism has been gradually superseded, in our times, by a naturalistic cosmological monism that not only questions basic concepts of human autonomy and voluntarism, as well as the epistemological equipment of democratic citizens, but also the particular conditions that would stir the current American heirs of the founding fathers to imagine that they could renew and regenerate their eroding democracy.

In light of this history and the cultural resources that enabled Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Vico, Rousseau, and the Federalists to adapt key components of the liberal democratic system of government to the circumstances and common sense of their contemporaries, what could possibly be the necessary adaptations required, and the resources available, for the advancement of democracy in our time? How can we cope with the collapse of the constitutional epistemology of modern democracy— its notions of political causality, public facts, objectivity, visibility and the accountability of political power? Most importantly, does the contemporary individual have a future as a democratic citizen? No less questionable is the very possibility of fashioning a collective political imagination in the increasingly demographically heterogeneous societies of our time. It is clearly hard to anticipate what would be the long-term impact of radical social, cultural and ethnic diversities on configurations of democratic politics.

Before even speculating on ways of persuading contemporary publics of the merits of a democracy for our time, we need to consider why— besides the erosion of the social epistemology of contemporary democracy— some leading contemporary thinkers have found the idea of liberal democracy and its practice so unendurable and even despicable. I will later ponder on what could possibly be the visions of a regenerated or radically new democracy. Carefully avoiding to triple the size of this book, I will address these questions briefly, with a focus on my double account of the current crisis of democratic regimes—the impact of the shift from the dualistic cosmology of modernity that divided the world into Nature and culture to a secular monistic cosmology that unites them (anthropocene), and the related eroding ways and habits which have been necessary to make sense of the political world and its constitutive elements: power, sovereignty, authority, legitimacy, political causality, law, elections, and the like.

**Chapter 18**

**Modern Critics of Democracy**

Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) strongly and aptly debunk the premises and practices of modern liberal democracy. I believe, however, that though instructive, their criticism is far from foreclosing novel pathways to future versions of this human enterprise. Nevertheless, the attacks launched by both these thinkers—from their different perspectives—on the very grounds of the liberal individual citizen as a political agent must be considered.

Consistently with modern dualistic cosmology, Foucault acknowledges that Man is a recent invention. He, then, seems sympathetic to Lacan's objections to the theory of the subject implicit in the philosophies of Descartes and Sartre, and its replacement by the mechanism of the unconscious. Foucault is one of the most eloquent critiques of the liberal-democratic individual as a voluntary political agent. His approach is partly enunciated in his concept of power: "Power … is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity…. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization…. Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."[[299]](#footnote-299) Furthermore, Foucault argues that power is "a machine in which everyone is caught….no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns."[[300]](#footnote-300) Obviously, a political agency which does not wield power, or power which eludes individual citizens, are inconsistent with the ways the imagined liberal democratic political process works. Equally obvious is the fact that an analytical account of cases of detachment between individual and political power may be warranted, in fact, as widely expected by common knowledge. And yet as a working hypothesis it undermines the influence of the imaginary of democratic citizenship which, as a faith or a trained attitude, can function as the productive fiction that enables its partial embodiment in practice. There is a tacit competition between analytical exposures of the absence of connection between political powers, individual democratic actors and the productive democratic imaginary that connects them; between theoretical and analytical insights that, once made public, might weaken the behaviors and institutions that support democratic political participation, and beliefs that buttress them. This tension between the analytical knowledge of political practice and the productive fictions that set the terms of its legitimacy is one of the dialectical aspects of the problem of knowledge in politics.

Carl Schmitt directs his objections to other aspects of the foundational productive imaginaries of modern democracy. Whereas Foucault argues that political power is elusive, basically invisible, consisting of diffused circulating streams that disempower the individual, Schmitt insists that "it is a fact that the entire life of a human being is a struggle and every human being symbolically a combatant."[[301]](#footnote-301) He maintains that while "the political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavors" including religion, national, moral and economic activities, the political dichotomy between friends and foes is so strong, so dominant—in his conception—that the antagonistic grouping of friends and enemies actually drives the politicization of all these other domains.[[302]](#footnote-302)

Imagining antagonism between friends and enemies as the essence of the political, Schmitt breaks away from the Western tradition that regards politics as embodying the human emancipation from the Hobbesian state of Nature. The special appeal of Schmitt's concept of the political largely derives from its perception as a mercilessly realistic orientation in a century of world wars. It is a concept diametrically opposed to the Enlightenment vision of politics—a vision of freedom, voluntary compromises, equality under the rule of law and universal political participation. Again, the supposedly real seems to compete here successfully with political imaginaries meant to function as reality-making productive fictions intended to change and shape—rather than mirror—political reality.

In some ways, Schmitt de-emphasizes the legal or symbolic intention of the Hobbesian social contract to emancipate humanity from the state of natural conflict, and actually transfers the pervasiveness of the conflict to the domain of the state, whereby the individual continues to be combatant only at exceptional moments. And even in such moments, the citizen-combatant operates within an organized framework that guarantees his discipline and obedience. Whereas Schmitt regards the *secularized political* as the essence of being human, he actually renaturalizes the political as an existential combat rather than humanize it as an expression of the individual's deepest freedom and liberation from arbitrary power. While liberal democrats have attempted to de-intensify the political, to allow for compromise, accommodation and even consensus, Schmitt puts the political on the edge as a matter of life and death. Inasmuch as Schmitt considers the conceptual structure of the modern state as a mere secularization of theological concepts, he prefers sovereignty over association as the theory of the state.[[303]](#footnote-303)

Carl Schmitt's concept of the political has, in many ways, converged with a combative exclusionary nationalistic concept of politics; with the political energy generated by antagonisms between nations—antagonisms which governments of nation-states usually fan in order to legitimate themselves, rationalize a massive enlargement of their armies, as well as restrict domestic civic freedoms. Whereas the democratic concept of "the people" is ambiguous enough to accommodate multiple identities and varieties of cultural expression, a nation of combatants and, especially, a nation-state inspired by imaginaries of biological, ethnic and religious bonds tends to cultivate, and often invent, as well as mythologize, a thick collective identity as a focus of solidarity and sacrifice. So Schmitt clearly frames the political primarily as the business of collectives, not individuals. Insofar as the political concerns the conflict between collectives, Schmitt insists that "[a] private person has no political enemies." When an individual declares that personally, he has no enemies, he "would like to place himself outside the political community to which he belongs and continue to live as a private individual only."[[304]](#footnote-304) Thus, a person who sees himself or herself as a citizen of the world, a member of the universal community of human beings, rather than of an always combative political community, imagines himself/herself as both having no enemy and as separated from the political. This position, in fact, rejects the primacy of universal human solidarity as the basic component and goal of liberal politics.

An examination of the respective implications of Foucault's and Schmitt's theories on the epistemological constitution and political culture of currently deteriorating modern democracies suggests that both, in different ways, negate the individual as an autonomous political agent. Both question or criticize the possibility of projecting apolitical perspectives on human actions and associations. Whereas both assume political power to be human and nonhierarchical, Foucault strongly negates any discernable and visible causal links of citizens and political power, while Schmitt mainly stresses the collective focus of political and physical powers on a well-defined enemy. Basically, then, both Foucault and Smith discard, explicitly or implicitly, basic imaginaries of democratic politics, including key elements of what I have called "the epistemological constitution of modern democracy."

A more contemporary thinker, Bruno Latour, is especially relevant to our discussion because he explicitly breaks away from the modern dualistic cosmology which has been foundational to the democratic political epistemology of the Enlightenment concept of democracy. Latour develops his theory of "modes of existence" on the basis of a naturalistic secular monistic cosmology that marks no borders between Nature and Culture, between human beings, animals and inanimate objects. Before discussing Latour's ideas, I would like to note a special difficulty experienced in reading and using his book *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence.* By contrast to common scholarly works, this, as well as his earlier work, *Politics of Nature,[[305]](#footnote-305)* is a nearly five-hundred page book which, despite having a detailed table of contents, lacks references, a bibliography and an index. The text itself echoes profound influences by other scholars such as Foucault, Schmitt and Descola, but they are barely discernable—in the absence of references— by non-scholarly readers.

These lacunas are not accidental. They reflect Latour's policy, intended to break away with traditional modern scholarship. Latour's explicit objection to references is part of his monistic critique of the moderns' dependence on "facts," on validations by access to the *external*, and the ideal of depersonalizing the individual's scholarly voice by commitment to the norm of objectivity. This position is part of Latour's denial of the dichotomy between human beings and the objective world or Nature. Monism is not congenial with any reference to external fact, claim or object. Despite his obscure style and his use of rare linguistic and Latinate formulations, Latour's book is written with a strong pedagogical orientation, with a clear intent to educate or train his readers or listeners to abandon modernism and its ontological and epistemological derivatives.

In some sense, such approach reflects the logic of Anthropocene, whereby the decisive impact of humanity on the shape, "behavior" and "destiny" of the globe makes it impossible to distinguish facts of Nature and facts of history, science and politics.

In order to assess the possibility that Latour's *Modes of Existence* offers elements of a novel democratic political imaginary for our time it is useful to compare his conception of the political not only with that of Foucault but also with that of another influential contemporary French political theorist—with Claude Lefort's analysis of contemporary democracy.[[306]](#footnote-306) Despite important nuances, there is still a great similarity in the ways these three French thinkers regard politics. Unlike Latour's, Lefort's works shows a solid commitment to democracy. He tries to reconceptualize it in such a way that it might accommodate political divisions without falling apart. Hence, he offers new ways of looking on the ideological-political fragmentation of the democratic polity. Foucault, to recall the citation above, observes that power is never localized, is never in anybody's hand. Lefort similarly sees "in democracy [an] empty core that constrains the urge of any hegemonic political group to shape and integrate the collective" according to its special ideas. He observes that since in a democracy, in a society "which can no longer be represented by the model of the body," (which was dominant in premodern monarchies), we see the "disincorporation of power." Such society "accepts division and the effect of division in any domain."[[307]](#footnote-307)

Lefort has advanced our understanding of the process by which competing political contents, like ideologies, rotate over time in guiding the polity. In order to enable such rotation, he suggests that we view any democratic polity as a system in the midst of which there is a void, an "empty space" which allows periodically each party, which is temporarily hegemonic, to pour into it its particular ideological content until it actually is driven out to leave, to empty the privileged space of hegemony to allow an alternative content to replace it by rotation reflecting a political change. This space in the core of the system resists any attempt to block the rotation by the effort of a temporary hegemonic political power to permanently institutionalize itself.[[308]](#footnote-308)

Also in Latour's view, politics is basically a kind of circular movement in which a multitude generates some kind of representation that deploys its temporary legitimacy to momentarily create a very fragile whole, a "One." The representatives impose rules to extract obedience from the entire people until the accumulation of complaints and resentments from below disintegrate the whole that returns to the state of a scattered multitude. At that point of the process, the circular movement starts all over again. The public space, which is always indeterminate, belongs to no one. Latour argues that

There is nothing more fragmented, interrupted, repetitive, conventional, and contradictory than political speech. It never stops breaking off, starting over, harping, betraying its promises (from the standpoint of the straight path), getting mixed up, coming and going, blotting itself out by maneuvers whose thread no one seems to be able to find anymore.[[309]](#footnote-309)

He further maintains that "twenty years ago" everyone could "feel that modernization was going to end, since it was becoming harder and harder by the day—indeed, by the minute—to distinguish facts from values because of the increase intermixing of humans and nonhumans."[[310]](#footnote-310)

Notwithstanding his brilliant insights into the current predicament, by viewing the subject/object division as a "prison," Latour not only rejects the basic tenet of liberal-democratic epistemology, but also negates the political basis for the attribution of voluntarism to individuals, their role as causes and, therefore, their responsibility for their actions in the liberal-democratic political context. Latour, often, in my view, does not appreciate, in this particular context, either the distinction between analytical insight and productive political imaginaries. In his zeal to repudiate the modern—wittingly or not—he overlooks the role of separating subjects and objects as a basis for creating a particular regime of political discourse, voluntarist political behavior and political freedom.

Rather than directly criticize democracy and the modern imaginary of freedom, he chooses to advance an alternative set of imaginaries of humans, Nature, Culture and materialism, whose contribution to the production of a practice of freedom remains between negative to ambiguous. There is nothing wrong, of course, in suggesting alternative imaginaries of cosmology, metaphysics and ontology for the purpose of reorganizing our universe and political world in response to the decaying cosmology and metaphysics of modernity. But no matter how realistic the possibility of exercising individual and collective political freedom is in our time, it is hard to dispense with such expectations and pave the way for inevitably disturbing alternatives. It is all well and good to further censure the moderns for having kidnapped science “to solve the problem of closure in public debates," and to object to illusions of demonstrable or conclusive truth; yet what besides science and the law are the alternative means left to end or bring to a closure a bleeding open conflict?

Latour urges us to abandon our modern languages which evolve "outside any context" and return to the only language available to us, in his view— to "natural language." By this he apparently means the "mother tongue that gives us confidence and is most useful if we recognize the plurality of modes of verification and recognize plural ontologies."[[311]](#footnote-311) What seems to be usefully included, in his view, is combining natural language and a shared perception of reality. As Donald Davidson, who, when asked, "How do you know that grass is green?" answered, "I know because my mother told me so."[[312]](#footnote-312) If Latour similarly means "mother tongue" in the sense of that which evolves in any society as the language of common sense, learned at home and in the street, there is neither really something radically new nor obviously supportive of Latour's "modes of existence." The reality we learn or acquire with our mother tongue is, indeed, the very commonsensical reality characterized by Clifford Geertz as a complex cultural system that defines, in any each given society, what is self-evident and practical.[[313]](#footnote-313) Giambattista Vico defined common sense as "an unreflective judgment shared [in any given time] by an entire social order." This language of common sense is, apparently, what Latour regards as natural language. But, contrary to his debunking of science and the culture of science as a modern dispensable element in natural language and the worldview it enacts, contemporary common-sense languages in Western societies are still significantly shaped by vestiges of scientific concepts of cause, effect, objectivity and the like. Otherwise, the injection into public discourse—following the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States—of expressions such as "alternative facts" and "fake news" would not have become such a scandal, such a provocation.

Yes, as I have been arguing all along, contemporary common sense, as a cultural system, is experiencing a crisis, partly stemming from the lay alienation from this legacy of science. But it is still the natural language learned— among others—from parents, neighbors, schoolteachers and social media. As such, what Latour calls "natural language" and its nomenclature for things and words, for causes and facts, is continually historically shifting alongside lay beliefs and notions of the real. Whereas at the present moment, this language still strongly echoes science, at some imagined future it may be radically different. Unless Latour falsely thinks that natural language is insulated from historical shifts in social belief systems about reality, by "natural language" he can only mean the language of the common sense of our particular period, and a reality that is somehow accessible to us only when what that language allows for is inseparable from what is allowed by contemporary perceptions or imaginaries of reality.[[314]](#footnote-314)

Failing to recognize the historicity and locality of common-sense languages and their equally shifting imaginaries of reality, how should we characterize the largely premodern political language of the founding fathers of the American republic, who passionately believed in conspiracy theories as satisfactory explanations for political events? What should we have made of the alternative post mid-nineteenth-century language and common sense which—under the powerful influence of the rising social sciences—learned to distrust conspiracy theories of politics and attribute political events to impersonal causes and processes?[[315]](#footnote-315)

I wonder what Latour would have thought of the mother tongue that imparted to London children words and beliefs in the existence of ghosts in the streets of the city at night—as late as the early nineteenth century—by contrast to the modified evolving commonsensical language, a few decades later, that distrusted reports about sighting ghosts, following the illumination of the streets of London by gas lamps?[[316]](#footnote-316) Maybe Latour considers that such diverse forms of discourse and understanding are captured by his demand of respect for "ontological pluralism," diverse "modes of existence," cancelling the signifier/signified distinction and accepting that different value priorities are held by different individuals and groups.

It is, of course, not inconceivable that the modern state may be on its way out in some possible future, opening the path for new kinds of political configurations encompassing more radically diverse modes of life and cosmologies, as Latour seems to maintain. But given the current nature and dynamics of the interplay of political power and military force in our planet, some of the ideas of Latour might be feasible in some limited territories but, for now, they remain basically irrelevant.

Latour's rejection of the dualism of Western cosmology is clearly influenced also by a comparative anthropology that accurately regards Western culture and politics as a very temporary local affair. The vast ethnographic record of numerous ways of life and modes of experiencing the world provides, of course, proper inspiration for our exploration of possible future configurations of regimes of freedom, of regimes not only diverse in their symbolic worlds and institutions, but also in their experience and embodiments of imaginaries alternative, or even antagonistic, to our own.

These many possibilities that are enabled, in the view of Philippe Descola, are barely mentioned by Latour, although he clearly prefers societies free from a modern naturalism which, unlike the moderns and, like himself, can "combine fiction and reference in the same way."[[317]](#footnote-317) Latour stresses, in particular, the advantage that such regimes may have, by rejecting the modern Western "obsession" with closures and solely material references; societies that enlist the mathematical language of demonstration while ignoring "multiple forms of verification." Moreover, Latour suggests that we consider alternative modes of existence such as law, religion, science, nature, politics, and economy, some of which clearly cannot—like religion—encompass human modes of existence, but, at best, some of their elements.

I have not found how this division into domains of discourses, norms, and practices helps to cope with the challenges of political life. But even if Latour does not consider politics as a mode of existence just in the narrow sense of the domain of politics limited to the *agora*— the site of the daily business of managing and directing collective life; even if he means, instead, politics as a fundamental latent or deliberately encompassing mode of organizing and framing the polity, it is certainly not an all-consuming mode of existence, but for a small group of professional politicians.

In the end, despite his endorsement of what I have previously termed "secular cosmological monism," Latour does not present suggestive speculations about a future democracy that would reflect this cosmological break with the dualistic Nature/Culture cosmology of modernity. We do not learn from him how plural ontologies, alternative "modes of existence," or the symbolic and multiple forms of verification can be related to democratic imaginaries and practices.

I fully concur, though, with Latour's respect for the role of fictions and their performance in politics as is evident from his former and current books.[[318]](#footnote-318) He aptly endorses, for instance, Walter Lippmann's imaginary of the problematic "Phantom Public" as a central political factor.[[319]](#footnote-319) Noting the fact that like "we" or the collective, the phantom public is always in a process of self-production. I also concur with Foucault's, Lefort's and Latour's respective descriptions of democratic political power and discourse as being fragmented, typically "crooked," avoiding straight talk; as circular, repetitive, contradictory and elusive to possession and employment by agents. I also join the general recognition that probably the gaps between the imaginary of democracy and its practices—which, in my opinion, can be narrowed—are, in many respects ultimately, unbridgeable. The question remains, however, whether such decaying democratic political practices can be changed and novel imaginaries of democracy could potentially have corrective effects on currently decaying democratic regimes.

In itself, the current stress on the glaring deviation of democratic politics from democratic norms—which I heavily attribute to the waning of the modern dualistic cosmology and its derivative constitution of democratic epistemology—does not discourage a commitment to democracy. Historically, reactions to the devastating violence and oppression inflicted by authoritarian regimes are far more effective triggers for a long-term renewal of the public commitment to freedom and democracy. But the question remains, what could be the new contents and epistemology of such a political system, in the absence of the foundations of cosmological dualism? Moreover, what are the potentially effective rhetorical resources and means of political communications available for the regeneration of a contemporary version of democracy? How can political freedom be imagined within an overarching imaginary of secular naturalistic monism?

I certainly do not want to raise the reader's expectations that I can give answers to these important questions. At best, I can try following Vico's great insight, that these are poets and other creative people who can generate imaginaries that can eventually furnish the political imagination anew, and try to find out whether there are any sites in contemporary culture were such creative people can provide leads for future imaginaries congenial for the possible recovery of self-fulfilling democracy.

Perhaps the most serious current symptom of the decay of current democracies is the breakdown of the disciplined civic public of modern democracy. A restoration, or a reimagination and reinvention of a democratic public capable of grappling with current conditions, a democratic public that could effectively criticize arbitrary governments and deprive governors of their legitimacy is an indispensable component of a proper democratic regime. In many democracies, the abuse of the public has rendered citizens dependent on their government, thus freeing governments from dependency on their citizens. I shall briefly discuss, in the following, two major current abuses of the democratic public that would have to be overcome on the path to the regeneration of democratic public and institutions.

**Can Democracy Recover? Concluding Reflections**

The question can democracy recover is on our mind today in light of the mounting and dramatic signs of its decline. But quite a few thinkers have always thought that democracy is never a given existing regime but an unembodied ideal, desire, ideology or a set of norms mostly partially approximated in some societies. Furthermore, the theory of democracy as the almost universal theory of legitimate power has been useful to criticize or debunk existing nondemocratic regimes. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has suggested that whereas democracy is not an actual condition it should be regarded as deferred future.[[320]](#footnote-320) He thinks that democracy is not an existing condition because it is constantly retarded by its own inner contradictions and self-destructive forces. He compares this self-destructive process to the biological process of autoimmunity, to the biological disorder whereby the immunization system attacks healthy cells. The equivalent in the case of democracy is when the epistemological foundations of democracy are enacted against democracy itself.

Populism as an autoimmune disease

The major example in our time to democratic autoimmunity is the rise of populism and the abuse of the democratic public.[[321]](#footnote-321) Populism rests upon the idea of “the will of the people” as the absolute source of legitimate democratic power, while disregarding the individual. Yet, in order to weld liberalism and democracy, a polity must negotiate the relations between the individual citizen and "the people," the "I" and the "we," without letting the inherent tensions between them violate their respective integrity. A failure to keep both can—as the record shows—easily lead to illiberal democracy, undemocratic liberalism or an authoritarian populist regime.[[322]](#footnote-322)

liberal democracy depends upon parliamentary institutions and groups that aggregate individual voices and interests, as well as channel them into centers of governmental public policymaking. Such delicate system is very vulnerable to the rise of leaders who claim to speak on behalf of the "people's will," unconstrained by institutions and the law. Free from the norms and restrictions of the normal institutional process, populism can sway their mass audience through xenophobia, nationalism and warranted or unwarranted charges against government corruption. Populists also mobilize massive public support by substituting the conventional democratic practice and imaginaries of participatory democracy for fictions of direct mass democracy and unambiguous "Will of the People." This false clarity is achieved by a radical resistance to the status quo, empowered by the emotional mobilization of resentment and hatred, targeting specific persons, organizations and institutions that represent the “Elite”.

In fact, anti-elitism is inherent in any democracy, since even leadership entails, in some respects, a contradiction of the democratic ethos of self-government. Hence, the anti-elitist animus of populism gains legitimacy from this compatibility with the democratic ethos. Thus, the main feature of populism of “us”, the laypeople, against “them”, the elite, is another example of the autoimmunity tendency of democracy.

It is true that to function politically, any democracy must fashion an acceptable working imaginary of *the public*—or its equivalent—sufficiently supported by lay experience to be regarded as the legitimizing source of power, as well as of its limits.

Yet, the rise of contemporary authoritarian regimes on the wings of populism in declining democracies is clearly not the kind of mobilized public that democrats have wished for. It raises the perennial paradoxical dilemma of democracy— how, for the sake of democracy, may the people be saved from the "people"? How can induced and self-generated abuses of the public as a source of legitimation, not actually approved by a substantive political and institutional process, be restrained? How can regulations, institutions and procedures channel public passions and interests so that leaders and governments will be compelled to be responsive to public needs and interests rather than act arbitrarily?

One obvious way to use the public against itself is, of course, by launching referenda, which were commonly exploited as fictions of direct democracy by populist authoritarian leaders. A referendum usually amounts to the capturing of a moment, a snapshot of the public, whose substance as a constant flow is left out. Not surprisingly, referenda are the characteristic instruments of misleading appeals to the people above the parliamentary process and the party system. It can take place also in democracies, as the Brexit referendum in Britain and the Catalan independent referendum may suggest. Leaders who know how to ask their publics the question that would ensure the desirable result could learn from Charles de Gaulle's famous example.

Populism is, in many respects, a close form of playing out the momentary "public" against its stable self and interests. It can generate moments of public excitement and solidarity that give politicians the utterly false unsustainable justification to speak for the people beyond the time of the referendum. This is precisely what the continual open parliamentary debate is meant to avoid.

Another political pathology lies in the exploitation of the false notion that democracy can be an unqualified rule of popular parliamentary majority unchecked by the minority or by a constitution. Democracy, in such cases, suffers from the tyranny of the majority—of an exclusory majority—especially when it initiates legislation that *curtails the chances of the minority to become a majority.*Its apparent affinity to the legitimacy of the parliamentary majority mechanistic decision-making renders the tyranny of the majority a favorite political strategy for abusing democracy, for replacing constrained parliamentary majority by what amounts to mere democratic gestures or make-beliefs in authoritarian and nationalist states, for pretending to speak for *the people*—which actually consists of both the majority and the minority.

A majority rule is often but a de-facto minority that privileges itself as a majority of a particular dominant ethnic and/or religious group. Israel—from Ben-Gurion to Netanyahu—has often displayed exclusory political majoritarianism. The priority of parliamentary majority in controlling legislation and public policies is, of course, a legitimate solution to the necessity of decision-making in a decentralized and pluralistic democratic polity. A majority decision is sometimes a necessity intended to avoid the mounting costs of an open-ended, unresolvable conflict. But, as the American founding fathers warned in the *Federalist Papers,* a parliamentary majority is, in fact, inasmuch a faction as the minority. Hence, they developed a system that would be politically balanced and inclusive.

Such balanced inclusiveness is swept away by waves of populism that have led, in an increasing number of countries during the early decades of the twenty-first century, to authoritarian nationalist regimes in several Latin American states, in European states such as Poland and Hungary, and to waves of undemocratic populism towards the end of the second decade in other countries. During the last few years, majoritarianism has begun to unsettle the balance in the American democracy, as well as in the Israeli.

Populism, that uses democracy against itself by distorting the basic fiction of democracy, “The people”, is only a symptom of the epistemological crisis I have elaborated on in the pages of this book.

Can democracy reimagine itself?

Democratic political imaginaries are a vital but not a sufficient precondition for the possibility of generating and regenerating a democracy. In the absence of conditions that bind shared democratic ideals with social motives, with political energies and the capacity to embody them in institutions, they are bound to remain abstract utopias against which people can merely recognize and assess their miserable state at the present or cultivate unrealistic hopes which block their ability to navigate their political life. But even when democratic regimes emerge, their sustainability is endangered—as we have been witnessing in our time—by several forms of institutional decay. A most important one consists in the deterioration of democratic publics disciplined by civic culture, which rests on civic democratic epistemology, as well as the erosion of politics by an increasingly authoritarian bureaucracy. In this book I have concentrated particularly, though not only, on both these adverse forces—on the formation and de-formation of the epistemological core of democratic civic public culture and politics as well as on the radical depoliticization of public affairs by bureaucratization, legalization, science and technology.

As I have indicated earlier, despite the assumption that democracy is a self-made, self-governed regime it is unlikely that humanity would easily overcome its tendency to opt for an imaginary of a political world lacking anchorage in some transcendental entity. People tend to opt for anchoring the political order upon an impersonal transcendental authority and are likely to be reluctant to recognize that the political world they inhabit has been unconsciously or consciously self-created, that it has emerged from their own collective political imagination—as Hobbes, Rousseau, Vico and Tocqueville recognized. The notion that the fundamental imperatives of their political world are rooted in human, often spontaneous or intuitive choices and actions, largely remote from their gaze and their own self-understanding, seems inherently unacceptable. The tendency to be attached to the transcendental would inevitably encourage the role of a transcendental God or transcendental Nature.

For people to recognize, with Giambattista Vico, that the political world they inhabit is, in many respects, of their own making, that it has originated from their ancient poetry, myths and traditions, real or invented history, would indeed be—in our time—problematized by the radical demographic, cultural, ethnic and religious heterogeneity of contemporary societies "In splintered world,” notes Geertz, "we must address the splinters"[[323]](#footnote-323) This means that a world which contains plurality of ways of being and belonging can hardly encourage the generation of shared collective imaginaries of political order except perhaps of versions of incoherent pluralism or eclectic whole.

Now, the disintegration of the democratic civic public, whose own solidarity and commitment to democracy has a history of endless setbacks, has often resulted in the rise of a variety of nondemocratic configurations. It includes a nationalist public based on tribal solidarity, often reinforced by racism and other exclusionist imaginaries of the other; authoritarian regimes whose leaders continue to deploy democratic rhetoric, and "failed states" which remained minimally democratic but decay as the result of an ungovernability bordering on anarchy and fragmentation.

A democratic imaginary viable for contemporary society would have to contend with the possibilities and liabilities of the contemporary cybernetic culture of mass-communication, with fanaticism and violence generated by extremist social media, with massive movements of migration and the vicissitudes of the global economy. Globalization has generated, in recent years, growing popular protests due to its deleterious effects on domestic political participation by removing centers of decision-making from local-political sites like parliaments to global-economic forums. These factors have exerted a profound impact on the migration of ideas and emotions, on the stability of worldviews and on modes of persuasion in our time.

If the prospect of novel political imaginaries of democracy adapted to our time depends upon a state of reflective and future-oriented consciousness, it must include the realization that people are trapped by the present order, unaware of its origins in human ideas and actions. A necessary condition for inducing change is the recognition that the political universe in which people dwell can be otherwise, and that they have the potential means to bring about change. All these realizations would remain theoretical if bereft of a general sense of urgency that will trigger the desire for an alternative order, and the recognition of the capacity to bring it about.

Political energies indispensable for massive changes or revolutions are likely to be generated by inner antagonistic forces as well as after periods of extreme repression. The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides two obvious cases of novel imaginaries that were initially powerful enough to trigger political movements inspired by visions of a new political order. The first one was Karl Marx's vision of a socialist society, free of class-war and uncorrupted by a state; the second was the Zionist movement, inspired by thousands of years of exile and repression which ever kept the vision of returning to Zion alive, and the vision of Theodor Herzl, who imagined the creation of a liberal Jewish state for persecuted Jews who would return to their historic Promised Land. The Zionist vision of Herzl appealed to an oppressed, ethnically and religiously particular people, whereas the political energies of socialism stemmed from the more general oppression of the working class. Despite the total failure of communism and the partial failure of Zionism, the energies marshaled by Zionism and Marxism demonstrate the powers of oppression to elicit resistance and passion for change.[[324]](#footnote-324)

Obviously, not every popular drive for change leads to democratic regimes. The historical record is, of course, fraught with examples of national liberation movements that engender, at best, only partially democratic nation-states. In the Russian Empire, the October Revolution, despite its early sweeping powers to inspire masses around the world by its idealism, has eventually come to illustrate the special corruption produced by welding power and utopia as a garment for the exercise of coercive power. It has been one of the blatant examples for a process that starts with the ability of leaders to mobilize power to serve an ideal which quickly turns into an ideal that serves power.

In any given society, the combination of a vision and a mass-movement geared to generate a democratic regime depends among other things on a measure of collective intuition or reflexivity, of public recognition that the present state is one of collective entrapment in an impossible predicament, that—as a mode of existence—political life could be otherwise, that the existing ensemble of entrenched habits, institutions and practices can radically change. Such collective reflexivity must be articulated in an ongoing public discourse of the kind stirred by prerevolutionary French intellectuals and, particularly, journalist-philosophers, who wrote and published political pamphlets which linked the salons and the Garb street, by the American intellectuals of the Federalist *Papers* which were widely diffused and discussed, as well as the Zionist intellectual and ideological discourse published widely in the literary political newspapers at the time.[[325]](#footnote-325) Another important condition for a political change inspired by democratic values is that a novel political imaginary of order must be articulated and discussed by sufficiently respected and influential individuals and groups that are capable of performing the inspiring political vision they share, so that it would come into existence. There is no freedom without activist political engagement, citizens' power to influence democratic institutions and politically penalize governments unresponsive to the rights of their citizens. The power of individuals and nongovernmental groups is indispensable as a deterrent against authoritarian governments. I recognize, of course, that the above conditions are ideal and unlikely to appear simultaneously in any particular historical context.

Who Will Reimagine?

In every society there are poets, philosophers, artists, ideologues and other creative individuals who generate imaginaries of the ideal of a viable collective life. The selection—among such imaginaries of order—of one that would be consistent with the people's values and beliefs for hegemony is an enormously complex process that combines conscious, unconscious and intuitive elements, as well as influential interests. It is a long process whereby the initiators are often unlikely to live long enough to even partially approximate the materialization of their vision. Hence, the emergence of a political order tends to be perceived as spontaneous, impersonal and, at times, as a normal development of tradition.

In Chapter 17, I have discussed the ways by which early modern political philosophers have formulated and attempted to diffuse novel ideas and imaginaries of politics. I indicated how thinkers such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Vico, and Rousseau deployed diverse dimensions of science to reinforce their arguments. To reiterate, sometimes, as in the case of Hobbes, the language of science was used, in tandem with classical rhetoric and the legal language of contracts, to describe emancipation from violence and fear of death in the state of nature. In the case of Locke, empirical epistemology and the statistical idea of probability were geared extensively as means to improve human judgment while making room for debate. Spinoza, in his Ethics, resorted to the style and aesthetics of geometry and showed, at the same time, great trust in the impact of fictive stories on popular beliefs. Vico insisted on the external, independent status of Nature as a mere object of the human gaze, unlike the sociopolitical world, which he sought to distinguish from Nature as a human domain in which human beings both create their political lives and observe nature. In addition, and by contrast to classical rhetoric, Vico also stressed the need to ignore all personal traits of interactive human communication and consistently relate only to content. Rousseau's' powerful appeal to his contemporaries and later generations consists of a rare combination of quasi-religious language (his civic religion), personal and often confessional writing (*The* *Confessions*), popular didactic literary works, a theory of education (*Emile*) compelling poetic expressions and metaphors, a profound engagement of emotions, and politico-legal logic.

In my book *Imagined Democracies*, I have discussed the central contribution of the arts and culture of the period to the formation of liberal democratic political forms during the Enlightenment, up to the second half of the twentieth century. Such analysis focused on the impact of science on the rising faith in human rationality; of the rise of the novel and mass-readership, that tended to fashion life styles and enhance socio-psychological realism; on the repercussion of the autobiographical genre in literature and of self-portraiture, as well as on the increasing performance of female voices in operas on the common-sense recognition of the individual and the individual's interiority as givens. Moreover, the spread of journalism and, particularly, of the documentary genre, opened up the way for mass-communication and the possibility of public debate. In our time, the socio-political authority of science and scientific discourse have been declining for many of the reasons mentioned in this book. Nevertheless, science still has kept some qualified authority in public discourse.

In our time, the foundational imaginary of the world left behind both the monistic divine cosmology of a world held by God, and increasingly as well the modern secular dualistic Nature/Culture cosmology of a world held by the transcendence of Nature. As previously indicated, the emerging contemporary monistic cosmology, according to which humanity and Nature form a unified whole, challenges the ontology and political imaginaries of modernity. I have tried to show in this book that attempts to draw, from this new foundational cosmological imaginary, useful insights for imaginaries of future democratic regimes, have not been, as yet, very encouraging. Monistic secular cosmology does not encourage faith in voluntary autonomous individualism, in imaginaries of culture and politics congenial to democracy as we know it. Despite my efforts above I cannot anticipate whether new political imaginaries of order would emerge, and whether it would be from contemporary poetry, philosophy, cinema, documentaries, painting, architecture or other arts, since these areas of human creativity have such potential.

Whereas the impact of the classical arts persisted, world wars and radical social and political transformations required new cultural contents and resources to reinforce and sustain liberal democracy. Perhaps we should look at what has been achieved by the resources that have not been available to early moderns and moderns, but have become central in our time. As we shall see, although the digital revolution has important potential for influencing political values and suasive imaginaries of post-Enlightenment political order, its impact on rejuvenating imaginaries of democracy has been meager and, sometimes, negative.

**The Illusion of Digital Democracy**

Perhaps the most promising recent effort to democratize social interaction and communications, to increase the weight of citizens versus governments, has been the invention of the Web, the electronic internet, and its most influential institutions: Google, Facebook, Amazon, Twitter, and the like. In many respects, the evolution of systems of horizontal voluntary communications between individuals and groups, the freedom of access and connection to other people, amounted to no less than the realization of the ultimate democratic dream of dispensing with hierarchical mediation and control. No wonder that these developments inspired new enthusiasm for the renovation of democracy in our time, for harnessing the digital technological revolution to the enhancement of freedom in the postmodern era. The period since its crystallization, from the latest decades of the twentieth century, provides a perspective on what came to pass, although the story is not yet over.

The early visions of the principal creators were very encouraging. Figures such as John McCarthy from the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab, Larry Page and Sergey Brin—the founders of Google— Jimmy Wales, a founder of Wikipedia and early Mark Zuckerberg, the co-founder and chairman of Facebook, were committed to the idea that they were pursuing a "public good" independent of governments, by way of launching noncommercial cooperative systems. Some expressed strong positions against government and authority, endorsing forms of individual interaction unmediated by third parties.[[326]](#footnote-326) The potential political antigovernment power of electronic media—Facebook, for one—has been recognized in authoritarian states such as China, Turkey, and Iran. Their governments were quick to impose limits, bans and censorship.

The emergence of Google, Amazon and Facebook as giant moneymaking monopolies could not dodge an increasing involvement of government regulations. Thus, the dream of technological creators, of "serving mankind," was caught-up between the competing, clashing forces of government (the regulations) and the commercial market. Noam Cohen has attempted to show how the interventions of market forces and regulators have transformed the democratic promise of the Web into threatening centralized monopolies that actually endanger human freedoms and open vast possibilities for dangerous manipulations.[[327]](#footnote-327) Others have also pointed to the powerful destructive forces of the web conglomerates. Tim Wu claims that the “attention industry”, that emerged from the first world war propaganda of Germany and Britain, has reached a severe intensity during the Facebook age. He believes that the “merchants of attention” concentrate and monopolize human attention in a sophisticated and targeted manner and convert it into profit lines. In his view the web became a cesspool of “commercial junk, much of it directed at the very basest human impulses of voyeurism and titillation.”[[328]](#footnote-328) Shoshana Zuboff coined the term “surveillance capitalism” to describe the processes by which corporations claim private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral predictions that are bought and sold in a new kind of private marketplace.[[329]](#footnote-329) Her famous saying that “we thought we were searching Google, but Google was searching us” reflects the undermining of human autonomy by the global tech companies.

But even supposing that neither governments nor markets had undermined the initial idealism of the early Silicon Valley innovators, could the hope for a novel democratic political culture be sustained on its own terms? I think that definitely not. There was something extremely naïve in the belief that free-universal access and human interaction could replace far more robust institutional structures for expressing and processing human preferences and channel them in such ways that they could yield legitimation, as well as watchdog working democratic governments. Again, the imaginary—cultivated by the Silicon Valley technological wonder-creators—of the public, liberated by digital technology from ignorance and authority, was utterly unwarranted.

Perhaps one of the most futile idealistic goals of digital technicians has been the production of "Big Data" (BD) as a way to approach near-perfect certainty. A figure like General B. Alexander—at the time head of the U.S cyber command—insisted that Big Data would enable direct contact with raw reality, unmediated by concepts and interpretations. Such illusion betrays, perhaps, an unconscious desire to overcome the epistemological crisis of modern democracy and the breakdown of common-sense reality by way of a technological fiat. But a common-sense perception of reality could neither be comparable to, nor replaced by a conception of "reality" based on Big Data.

Whereas commonsensical conceptions of reality are based on habits and conventions, in the case of Big Data, no amount of information can be equated with knowledge, or even with a tentative conception of reality, in the absence of the arduous employment of analytical tools, selective and classificatory strategies and theoretical frameworks.[[330]](#footnote-330) Given the uneven distribution of such skills and capacities, mountains of data cannot lend themselves to universal access. As demonstrated by the abuse of Big Data by experts of the company Cambridge Analytica (CA)—which constructed profiles of eighty-seven million users of Facebook as a service to the 2016 election campaign of Donald Trump—the dark commercial and political uses of Big Data are more readily available than its potential for democratization.

Universal access to bodies of information could not be equated with access to knowledge or truths, given the very unevenly distributed analytical skills and interpretive capacities of internet users. [[331]](#footnote-331)

Such an uneven distribution of the powers to extract knowledge from information was bound to reflect huge social gaps in education, income and culture. All that the mega Silicon Valley corporations have done is create the fiction, the illusion of universal access to ideas and contents. The hopes or manifest goals of the core of innovators have insufficiently considered that the unpredictable interaction between the electronic media and its users produces often unanticipated, thoroughly negative consequences. Designers of tools to serve specific purposes cannot predict how these will be used and for what purposes. This is often the tragedy of great inventions, such as airplanes and atomic energy. The potential of the various platforms and channels for diffusing contents, devised with the intention of disseminating information, were increasingly manipulated also for commercials, for spreading misinformation, collecting information about the internet users and selling it to third parties fraught with political and business interests. Such global exposure also enhanced business models to augment their profit-making at the expense of users' privacy. Moreover, these platforms served as—usually, but not always— unintended facilitators for cyber wars and fake news, aimed to disrupt domestic discourse and poison national elections. An NYT editorial of 2018 asserted that "academics and experts are still piecing together the puzzle of how advertising system honed on personal information can enable foreign propaganda campaigns, and to what extent this phenomenon affects democratic elections" ("Did Facebook Learn Anything from the Cambridge Analytica Debacle?" October 8, 2018).

Even in the absence of foreign meddling in the internet, Facebook and other platforms have enabled the fragmentation of central professional news sources, facilitating the splintering of internet users to narrow ideological and extremist groups which continually feed their captive audiences with prejudices and racial contents that exacerbate hatred and violence.

But even an idealistic, benevolent, humane and liberal design of the internet could misfire by failing to fathom the socio-psychological complexity of the social interaction between human beings by means of digital machines. An example is the initial naïve belief of Mark Zuckerberg that encouraging connections between people by means of Facebook would enhance human empathy and even compassion. Whereas part of his vision has partially materialized, there were also opposite pernicious effects, such as the spreading of hatred and anger. What Zuckerberg's optimism missed out was that any emotional attitude towards others is mediated by the subject's moral imagination and his/her experiences of the others as social, ethnic or cultural groups.

Moreover, to experience compassion for others *qua* human beings, independently of their particular attributes, requires a culturally-framed orientation that perceives all individuals as humans, regardless of their group identities and affiliations. The social and cultural dimensions of human empathy or compassion are extremely complex. Critics have pointed out that often expressions of compassion are characteristic of the privileged who conveniently replace the search of justice for the poor and the sufferers by fleeting, empty gestures of empathy. The mass-communication system of the internet is liable also to encourage gestures towards abstract, rather than substantive universalism— virtual entities other than real people. In one of the most sophisticated studies on morality, media and politics, French sociologist Luc Boltanski shows that spectators exposed to distant suffering over the media become frustrated on account of their inability to act and, somewhat surprisingly, substitute their compassion for the sufferers by anger at the known or imagined perpetrators.[[332]](#footnote-332)

The failure of the digital democratic idealism reflects, in many respects, the limitations of engineers' simplistic concepts of causality when transferred from the context of machines and systems to the multi-dimensional dynamic realm of society. Still, we should not necessarily consider the decay of this idealism—brought about by market and government pressures or by a misunderstanding of the complex interaction between technology and human behavior—as the end of the story. We can imagine circumstances under which, with the implementation of regulation, geared to enhance the uses of the internet to inform and enable judgment by participants, things can significantly improve.

What Would Be Reimagined?

Beyond the contexts of the unfulfilled promise of the digital democratic revolution, obviously, the basic problem extensively discussed in former chapters remains the deterioration of democratic epistemology and the demise of common sense as an epistemological arena of cooperative democratic politics. My extensive description of the epistemological constitution of modern democracy suggests that it has been basically positivistic. Causality was perceived as material, real and observable. Similarly, public facts were considered as external, material, real and observable. Hence the centrality of the faith in the visibility of political power and governmental accountability. Common-sense perceptions of the physical world, that were basically popular versions of the Newtonian world, were lagging behind, not yet fully formed interpretations and translations of, Einstein's physics and quantum mechanics.

The erosion of this perceptual world with its conventional realism was reinforced by the spread of constructivism in the social sciences and the recognition of latent— not just Freudian— causes behind human behavior and its effects. It has been exacerbated by several decades of exposure to television, commercial fantasies, science fiction and fake news. Contemporary publics, more uncertain than ever about where to place the demarcation line between the factual, fictitious and fantastic, have extended the common popular bias to trust the visibly real—as if it were a given, free of interpretation—onto fictitious fabrications, thus destabilizing the former role of democratic publics in checking political deceit and holding their government accountable.

Still, I continue to believe in advancing the idea that key elements of a modern democratic political imaginary and practice can be generated and sustained in our time and in our foreseeable future by way of transplanting the basics of democratic political epistemology onto new grounds. Rather than adhere to our reliance on the failed grounding of democratic epistemology in a positivistic naturalistic ontology, I suggest to transmute its basis to an ethical-normative anchorage, to an explicit or tacit collective commitment to preserve and cultivate freedom on the basis of novel axioms. Put differently, this means to morph the basis of politics to alternative productive fictions. More specifically, this would require replacing the modern ontological defense of the present decaying democratic order—including its conceptions of the individual, as well as materialistic notions of causes and effects, of public facts and of visibility— by an ethical imperative to keep and employ these categories as pragmatic building-blocks of democratic worldmaking, based upon attitudes that regard freedom "as if" it could be produced as a fact.

In other words, we need a collective moral-political commitment to replace the given anachronistic foundations of our decaying democracy in nature and rationality by a moral commitment to nature and common-sense rationality as **practical fictions**. This attitude will reject all attempts, reinforced by the monistic postmodern cosmology of biological reductionism of human Nature and behavior, although—as demonstrated by Spinoza's ethics—it can be compatible with metaphysical holism. Of course, precisely such a naturalistic cosmology and its derivative ontology has enabled the fictions of natural law, of sovereignty and of materialistic causality to be considered as facts that regulate human affairs.

Still, the novelty of grounding a democratic epistemology on ethics rather than on the anachronistic naturalist ontology of modernism will protect democratic political structures from the current cosmological revolution. We should expect such a change to provoke criticism regarding its inconsistency and baseless idealism. It would appear inconsistent vis-à-vis the postmodern vestiges of modern ontology and the implicit separation between man and the world which it enabled. But not vis-à-vis the reigning secular monistic cosmology. There will probably surge a massive critical reaction to such a conception of a world, completely disconnected from anything resembling an external world and positive facts, a world that would appear to many as a mere fantasy, rather than an instrumentally productive moral or perceptual fiction.

I think that we may overcome such objections by realizing that in our daily life we often spontaneously turn subjective experiences into objective events or facts. Thus, Einstein showed that an individual who initially experiences lightning as a personal experience, by later attributing this experience also to that of other persons who witnessed the same phenomenon, he (from the perspective of physics) falsely converts it into an "objective event."[[333]](#footnote-333) As Nelson Goodman insists, when we casually say "the sun is setting," we do not usually bother to verify this assumption. We do not invest extra energy to check this convenient commonplace against the hypothesis that it is really the earth which is rotating.[[334]](#footnote-334) Philosopher John McDowell argues against the common "myth of the given," against the postulation of nature as something given from the outside. He insists that "nothing is given from outside the *evolving system of belief*"(italics mine).[[335]](#footnote-335) In all these cases—lightning, sunset and the external givenness of nature—our experiences and language are naturally integrated into our common daily life.

Even more so with respect to political and moral matters; when we neither bother nor verify that events and actions are adequate by common norms, we perceive and consider them *as if* they were. We naturally assume that elections express the people's will; we also generally believe that legislated laws become apolitical in their authority and applications and, most of the time, that our banks are safe. When we board an airplane we tend to assume that it will take us to our destination. Our perceptions are influenced, in such cases, by our reluctance to live in constant doubts and anxiety. That is also why we do not have a private home laboratory to check the composition of every drug we occasionally take. We prefertotreat drugs *as if* they were safe and designed to do what the doctor and drug leaflet says.

Most pertinent to our concerns here are the attributes we tend to assign to our fellow humans. If we tend to perceive them *as if* they shared with us moral capacity, we contribute to the formation of a liberal-democratic society. If, by contrast, we regard our fellow men or women as selfish and morally blind, we are on our way to forming some kind of conservative nondemocratic society. Very often, in the absence of evidence, and sometimes even in defiance of evidence, our tendency to assign attributes to our fellow persons *as if*they were so and so bears the power to enhance particular cultures of social interaction and politics. Since so many aspects of our life are mediated by our willingness to relate to objects and persons *as if* they possessed the properties we normally attribute to them, can this spontaneous, all too human strategy, be elevated to the level of consciousness and even creative deliberation, to introduce not habitually ontologically grounded "givens," but invented entities and actions as "real" attributes that could function as productive fictions, building blocks of political regimes of freedom in our changing times? [[336]](#footnote-336)

Maybe we can draw support for this approach from the insights of German philosopher Hans Vaihinger, whose philosophy of "as if" (published in 1911),[[337]](#footnote-337) bears a strong affinity to the function of the collective political imagination in generating a partly correspondent behavior. Also Vaihinger thought that—under various circumstances—human beings do, and should, abandon realism (which is often but a frozen set of fictions) in order to pursue new useful fictions. In some sense, the enormous complexity of the world we live in, forces us both to be selective and simplify the frames of our experience in order to conduct ourselves. Vaihinger praises Adam Smith's axiom that we regard humans *as if* they were rational egotists, whose self-serving behavior unintentionally serves the general welfare, which enabled him to develop an endurable theory of the competitive market. This axiom—once integrated into the collective imaginary of a given community—proved useful for regulating economic transactions in a way that served the goals of some interests which, in turn, supported it and further encouraged a behavior consistent with such rational egotism. Despite the fact that the market system is made of fictions, it became fixed by naturalization, which elevated it as a given mechanism beyond economics and politics.

The point is that rational egotists and self-regulating market mechanisms are constructs made of believable fictions, of *as if* realities of human nature and interactions. Smith's theory, then, is not a mirror of reality, but a set of useful beliefs about a hypothetical reality that both becomes partly self-fulfilling and supposedly serves purposes desirable to the people who support it. Because of the inherent limitations entailed in having and using public knowledge of a complex and partly ambiguous reality to guide and coordinate human behavior, individuals and collectives have been intuitively driven to prefer contrived, schematized and believable conceptions of human realities *as if* they were valid. A similar attitude is involved in our everyday attribution of intentions to agents in our milieu in order to anticipate and judge their behavior. Such schema of attribution can be stable until repudiated by skeptics, by frustrated expectations, or by more believable alternatives.

In the political context, the social contract— like the market in the economic context— is nothing but such an *as if* entity, hypostatized through social and political institutions by means of a very similar behavior to that of other embodied hegemonic imaginaries. I have previously suggested that the voluntary basis of the social contract and the attribute of rationality to players in the naturalized market do not appear compatible with the holistic secular cosmology of postmodernity, which denies the separation of Nature and Humanity. This contradiction is easily resolved by the fact that incompatible fictions can coexist as having differential instrumentality in relation to different purposes.Also in science, inconsistent theories are accepted when they can serve—respectively and differentially— the goals of predictability, simplicity, representation, theoretical fruitfulness and mathematifiability. There is no scientific theory that can fully serve all such goals simultaneously. In this respect, different sub-imaginaries can be wisely and pragmatically held together to serve a democratic order.

Popular culture today may be defined as a culture with a significant section of "positivistic-fiction," of fiction taken as fact. It is hard to imagine the political implications of this development for the regeneration of democracy because it can work both ways. It could facilitate the process whereby democratically productive fictions might gather credibility and power, as well as engender anti-democratic, even fascist political fictions.

Hence, belief in key elements of democratic epistemology, such as horizontal causality, public facts and objective expert authority, may be used and deployed in a postmodern context as long as they serve a strong political desire for democratic legitimation, accountability and political freedom, even in the absence of a positive external ontological anchorage. Moreover, a region divided by diverse local cultures and identities can accommodate equally different local political versions of democratic epistemology leading, in different ways, to a shared institutional order.

I propose here the challenge of a collaboration between the political and the moral imagination to save democracy in the postmodern era. Such partnership may include the capacity to dispense with anachronistic unachievable ideals of harmony and coherence and replace them by the willingness to engage inconsistent rationales and imageries for shared pragmatism. In particular, the task is to reinstate the basics of the democratic political epistemology in our disappearing modern political culture within a framework adaptable to the current recognition of the creative powers of the collective imagination to lay the grounds for a novel approach to politics.

I believe that democracy can be saved by replacing a naturalistic with a moral-political epistemology that would reflect the recognition that in our time we need to direct our faith onto a new imaginary. An imaginary of a politics of freedom based on a moral-political epistemology that will yield the very ontology which would confer back upon this imaginary the status of a given. As such, it would liberate politics from its naturalistic grounds and enable a post-enlightenment democracy. Inasmuch as all period epistemologies result from fundamental, usually unconscious or intuitive human imaginaries, elevated, sustained or demoted by shifts in collective faiths, the change from a naturalistic to a moral-political epistemology is but another such shift influenced by changing values.

Such a move would reflect the enduring power of a political ontology derived from moral epistemology rather than from naturalistic cosmology. This yoking may include the capacity to dispense with the dated ideals of knowledge-based rational politics and supersede them by the willingness to engage citizens' emotions and inconsistent rationales for shared pragmatism. In particular, the task is to reinstate the basics of the democratic political epistemology in our disappearing modern political culture on a radically different basis. If past philosophers were engaged in the effort to find theories that would "save phenomena,"[[338]](#footnote-338) I propose here the challenge of a collaboration between the political and the moral imagination to save democracy in the postmodern era.

In any case, as I suggested earlier, whereas democracy is currently the only worldly recognized theory and justification for legitimate power, it is— considering the diffusion of power and political diversity—probably the most impractical regime in contemporary societies, although occasionally also the most prosperous one.

In this book I have tried to show that perhaps the most crucial and least correctable present crisis in democratic faith is caused by the collapse of the social epistemology of contemporary democracy, the ability of citizens to link political causes and effects, to separate public facts from fictions or basically make sense of the political world in which they live. Here the distrust of science, the professions, the press and the rejection of all elites in the name of authentic equal lay citizens undermined key habits, conventions and constructive fictions that allowed a certain approximations of democratic norms. Because of the necessity of coping with these inner contradictions and democratic "antibodies", democracy is in some sense an unfinished project, a regime always in a state of becoming. Given this state of affairs to say that democracy is to come in a differed future is an act of faith, of speculative optimism. It replaces the diagnosis that democracy is fatally and irreversibly declining. Saying with Derrida that democracy is becoming is to say that democracy is still a promise.

**Epilogue**

**“Depth skepticism” and the roots of democratic crisis**

A spirited mind never stops within itself; it is always aspiring and going beyond its strength; it has impulses beyond its powers of achievement. If it does not advance and press forward and stand at bay and clash it is only half alive. Its pursuits are boundless and without form, its food is wonder, the chase, ambiguity.

Michel de Montaigne, *Essays, “Of Experience.”*[[339]](#footnote-339)

Imagine a deluge of scholarly works, all describing the symptoms of a disease—but offering no discussion of the deep-rooted factors that caused the outbreak. In recent years, in the face of the growing phenomena of democratic backsliding and populism’s rise in many countries, from mature and established democracies like the United States and United Kingdom to emerging democracies like those in Poland and Hungary, many scholars have devoted considerable effort to describing the phenomena accompanying the deterioration of democracies as well as the circumstances exacerbating them.[[340]](#footnote-340)

Perhaps surprisingly, these studies have revealed that many countries have experienced remarkably similar trends associated with processes of democratic backsliding. Indeed, these trends are so similar that one could believe that the leaders of these countries are working from the same playbook on populism.[[341]](#footnote-341) Despite their unique social, historical, cultural, national, and other qualities, each of these nation states has followed common lines of retreat toward a “hollow democracy.”[[342]](#footnote-342) These include a series of similar measures to undermine democracy, all aimed at strengthening the authority of the executive at the expense of other authorities, while reducing the freedoms of citizens—particularly those who fail to echo the message of the government. This is accomplished by abusing the democratic legitimacy derived from the principle of majority rule.

These processes occur in three spheres simultaneously: the legal-institutional arena, the social arena, and the arena of “free spirit” institutions. In the legal-institutional sphere, the first move involves undermining the checks and balances between authorities, in particular, weakening the judiciary and curtailing its independence.[[343]](#footnote-343) Meanwhile, invoking mantras of quasi-democratic supremacy, such as “the will of the people,” attacks are made on various gatekeepers who, in their role as expert, anti-majority elements, serve as restraints within the political system. To this end, legislative initiatives (or even, as in the case of Hungary, a new constitution) are advanced that, while anti-democratic in essence (since they harm equality, the election process, and human dignity), are ostensibly procedurally democratic because they were ratified by a legislative majority.[[344]](#footnote-344) Such moves are accompanied by a unprecedented phenomenon, whereby any norms not explicitly enshrined in law are disrespected, while instances that the law could not foresee are cynically exploited. All of this is made possible by an utter lack of respect of politicians for the norms of democratic political culture and the absence of any public, personal, and ministerial responsibility of elected officials.[[345]](#footnote-345)

Meanwhile, at the level of the very democratic process itself, changes are often made to the election system and to how elections are conducted. Sometimes, even the institutions charged with supervising elections are taken over.[[346]](#footnote-346) These moves are carried out against a backdrop of attacks on experts and professionalism in general, and public service in particular, the latter delegitimized as the embodiment of the so-called “Deep State.”[[347]](#footnote-347) Instead of professional public servants, the government prefers to appoint “loyal” servants, with the expectation that they will unquestioningly support the political echelons without exercising any sort of independent or expert judgement.[[348]](#footnote-348) All of this is inevitably accompanied by a loss of public confidence in democratic institutions along with a weakening of the democratic state’s ability to tackle the challenges facing it.[[349]](#footnote-349)

The second sphere of attention of the “playbook” involves creating a propitious social platform for its moves—one of extreme social polarization. As Nancy Bermeo has observed, democracies collapse not because of the “masses,” but rather because of the deepening of social polarization by political elites in the pursuit of greater political capital.[[350]](#footnote-350) Polarization, then, is the main cause of the death of democracies. The most effective method for creating polarization is to leverage pseudo-democratic populist ideas, thereby creating a rift between the so-called authentic, popular, indigenous, patriotic “people” and the alienated, arrogant, and treacherous “elites.”[[351]](#footnote-351) Adding to this, minorities—in particular, national minorities—can easily be turned into scapegoats toward whom all arrows of hate can be directed, and this fear of them helps intensify the inward solidarity of the “people.”[[352]](#footnote-352) The creation of a polarized “us” versus “them” is the best fuel for damaging democracy. This polarization finds expression in extreme anti-pluralism, where the only voice permitted to be heard is the “voice of the people,” while society’s “others”—minorities, the opposition—are delegitimized and labeled as “traitors.”[[353]](#footnote-353)

The third sphere in which democratic backsliding occurs is that of intellectual freedom, with its opponents advancing initiatives to limit freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of protest at the individual and the minority levels. This process occurs in tandem with a war of attrition in the “free spirit institutions” —civil society, the media, the academy, and the arts. Governments in various countries have found creative ways to limit the activities of civil society organizations, in particular those working to safeguard human rights and protect minority groups, including by limiting their income under the pretext of ensuring “transparency” regarding their funding sources.[[354]](#footnote-354)

Wresting control of mainstream and digital media is another necessary step in fortifying populist-authoritarian governments. To this end, such governments may turn to one or a combination of several options, such as: limiting public broadcasting, suffocating its sources of funding, or conducting a hostile takeover; establishing channels that reflect the image of reality to which the government prefers to expose the populace; shutting down “subversive” outlets; and undertaking covert intervention in social networks to shape public opinion, including through fake news and deepfakes.[[355]](#footnote-355)Academia, with its tendency toward criticism and skepticism and its reliance on scientific evidence, also poses a threat to those seeking to establish governments without limitations. In some countries, therefore, academic institutions and academics have been exiled or banned. In others, actions have been taken to send a chilling message to those in the academy, warning them to maintain a low profile and self-censor, lest their appointments, awards, and research budgets be affected.[[356]](#footnote-356) Finally, the arts, which are also required to follow the government line and convey only nationalistic, patriotic messages, are threatened if they act in accordance with the very nature of artistic expression –being critical, creative, and not consensual.[[357]](#footnote-357) The threat to the arts is both overt—the denial of funding or explicit censorship—and “beneath the radar,” in the form of institutional self-censorship (such as by museums or theaters) or by individual artists themselves.[[358]](#footnote-358) Notably, in this context, Ezrahi presciently observed, years before the events of the last few years, that:

Literary and artistic creators usually do not undermine the foundations of the regime. What frightens the representatives of the government is the human spirit that feeds these creators, the human aspiration to soar beyond reality on the wings of imagination, to give free expression to unexpected thoughts and feelings… Since creators in literature, art, and science can expand human consciousness, they will always threaten those who demand the public show blind loyalty to the single, one-dimensional narrative on which the government rests. The state’s attack on creators…will not succeed, because the freedom of thought and the fervor of creation are stronger than any political or military force.[[359]](#footnote-359)

In addition to describing and analyzing the processes of democratic backsliding, many scholars have also traced the circumstantial factors that have caused this phenomenon to materialize at this particular time, including globalization, immigration, economic crises, the digital revolution and social networks, the strengthening of identity politics, disillusionment with liberal democracy, and the deepening of class tensions and tensions between values.[[360]](#footnote-360) These are simultaneously both factors in themselves and catalysts for the destructive processes now undermining democracy. The digital revolution, for example, which was initially heralded as a modern-day *agora* for democratic regimes, has instead become a real threat to the democratic order, concentrating immense power of a kind we have never witnessed before in the hands of colossal monopolies, threatening the autonomy of individuals.[[361]](#footnote-361) Similarly, the identity discourse that was intended to liberate democracy from the shackles of “faceless” liberalism, and enrich the image of the democratic citizen, has metamorphosed into a cage that preserves social divisions, justifies anti-liberal practices in communities living in democratic states, and limits free political discourse.[[362]](#footnote-362) The synergy between the consequences of these stated factors on the state of democracy show that there are unknown, more fundamental forces at play. It is their destabilization that has transformed them from a potentially positive influence to a threat to democracy.

Against the backdrop of this important and comprehensive research literature, which describes and analyzes a visible, lived, and describable reality, Ezrahi’s new volume commands special attention, presenting a unique perspective, inviting the reader on a “journey into the depths” in search of the roots of the contemporary crisis of democracy. Ezrahi identifies the underlying cosmological dimension, which has undergone a tectonic shift from the previous dualistic cosmology of Nature/Culture to a monistic cosmology of in which “Human” and “Nature” are not separated but blurred together due to human effect on nature (hereby I will call this monistic cosmology “HumaNature.”) This has had far-reaching consequences for the epistemology of the Enlightenment that had previously fashioned the democratic political imagination. In his 2012 book, *Imagined Democracies—Necessary Political Fictions*, Ezrahi sketched the anatomy of the democratic political imagination and established its constitutive status in relation to the epistemology underlying democracy.[[363]](#footnote-363) These two books were preceded by *The Descent of Icarus* in 1990, in which Ezrahi analyzed the role of science in the establishment of democracy and the ways in which politics makes use of science.[[364]](#footnote-364) In this epilogue, I suggest that looking back at this trilogy of Ezrahi, together with his extended research opus, reveals the trajectory of a “journey into the depths” on which he and his thinking embarked simultaneously.

What is a “journey into the depths” and who are those who embark upon it? In my doctoral thesis, which Ezrahi supervised, I refer to such thinkers as “depth skeptics”[[365]](#footnote-365) Depth skeptics adopt what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” where the individual not only doubts phenomena and the world but is also skeptical in relation to awareness itself. This differs from the Cartesian tradition, which focuses on an individual’s consciousness as a source of skepticism, rather than on what is being doubted.[[366]](#footnote-366) What depth skeptics have in common is a sense of discontent with a superficial description of phenomena and instead search for the deeper sources that can connect various phenomena that are otherwise perceived as unrelated. The thinkers I discussed in my thesis—Augustinus, Montaigne, Rousseau, and Freud—accomplished this through intellectual self-inquiry. They embarked on a “journey into the depths” of their consciousness and discovered that the source of the divisions, contradictions, and conflicts that exist above the surface lies within them. These are experienced by individuals as being between body and soul, Nature and Culture, the individual and society, conscience and law, and appearance and the truth of the matter. The unique nature of depth skeptics lies in the fact that by identifying the deep currents that lie the root of phenomena, they have been able to formulate truths that have withstood the test of time.

Through his writings, Ezrahi has embarked upon an intellectual “journey into the depths,” delving ever deeper into the investigation of the intricacies of the objects of his investigation—first and foremost democracy. The three main landmarks of this journey are the three book that have become his trilogy, of which this volume is the third part, while writings of his have also helped clarify and elucidate the many implications of the insights gained during his “journey into the depths.” The trilogy, as I will show, took on this meaning in a retrospective way (“afterwardsness”) in the psychoanalytic meaning of the term[[367]](#footnote-367)—Ezrahi’s later ideas provide a renewed and deeper meaning to his earlier writings. The first book in the trilogy, *The Descent of Icarus*, in which Ezrahi analyzes the role of the scientific revolution in the establishment of modern democracy—and also identifies the seeds of the rifts that we are experiencing today—is the result of a paradigm shift in his thought. Indeed, Ezrahi acknowledged this in a 2009 lecture:

When I returned to Israel after completing my doctoral studies at Harvard, I believed that politics could be “made scientific,” but, in fact, it became clear to me—and this was a discovery of such profound enlightenment that I wrote an entire book as a result of it—that science is a source of authority in politics more than it is a source of knowledge. It became clear to me that politicians have a marvelous ability to use scientific authority for their own needs while neglecting scientific knowledge itself.[[368]](#footnote-368)

In *Descent of Icarus*, Ezrahi points out the various ways in which science has shaped modern Western culture, and identifies the political and ideological role of science in establishing the concept of the anchors of liberal democracy: *action*, *authority*, and *accountability*. In this final part of his trilogy, Ezrahi shows how science has served both as a source of legitimacy for democratic politics and as a model for its conduct. The scientific revolution, in its quest to establish objective truths pertaining to Nature and other phenomenological aspects, has fundamentally altered the human perceptual lens. It transitioned from a state of reverential observation and admiration of the monarch’s grandeur to a critical scrutinizer demanding empirical evidence as a prerequisite for establishing credibility. In contrast to the invisible world preferred by religion, science aspires to present a world that is observable—a Nature that is transparent. Ezrahi demonstrates this idea through examples from the world of scientific research, such as that of the seventeenth century chemist Robert Boyle, who invited a gentlemanly English audience to view his experiments. Another example is the manner in which Antoine Laurent Lavoisier’s ideas about invisible gases became a tangible reality with the invention of the hot air balloon. [[369]](#footnote-369) On this idea of transparency of government, Thomas Paine built his famous analogy between Nature and the new democratic state, where the government is transparent because, unlike a monarchy, it has nowhere to hide—nor does it have anything *to* hide.[[370]](#footnote-370) In an article written upon the publication of the Hebrew translation of *The Federalist Papers* in 2002, Ezrahi emphasizes the degree to which the concept of politics in American political culture demonstrates that the empirical-experimental has extended far beyond the study of physical nature to encompass the state, law, and society. Thus, politics is seen as a transparent process for all, with no room for mystification or obfuscation. Here, Ezrahi cites de Tocqueville, who wrote that democratic citizens in the United States tend to rely only on what they see with their own eyes, and to refrain from any attempts to place intermediaries between themselves and the truth.[[371]](#footnote-371)

The alliance between democracy and science has transformed science—a field that studies, reflects, and represents Nature—into a powerful political resource through which political decisions are based on, and presented as the result of, objective apolitical reality. In essence, scientific authority has been used to depoliticize public policy, enabling an alliance between the government and the public that is based on the public’s understanding of, and consent to, the state’s “objective” actions. It should be noted that the alliance between science and democracy was formed within the context of an implied understanding that representations of reality are based on scientific knowledge that “both embeds and is embedded in social practices, identities, norms, conventions, discourses, instruments, and institutions…”, as Sheila Jasanoff has argued. [[372]](#footnote-372) In fact, scientific knowledge and social norms co-produce each other. The realities in which we live are understood, but many aspects of these invented and imagined worlds have become self-evident and unquestionable. However, in this new volume, Ezrahi shows that the fabric of these hidden and unshakeable shared beliefs, “common sense,” has been undermined, and the disintegration of the alliance between science and democracy, especially since the mid-twentieth century, is one of the main epistemological symptoms of the decline of the cosmological Nature/Culture dichotomy.

In the first book of the trilogy, *The Descent of Icarus*, Ezrahi also shows how the machine became a metaphor for promoting the political order.[[373]](#footnote-373) Human attitudes toward machines—such as a wristwatch or an aircraft—are dualistic. The machine is seen as an artificial extension and as an embodiment of the inescapable forces of Nature according to which humanity operates. At the same time, it also represents a human expression of the divine ability to create beyond the limits dictated by Nature.[[374]](#footnote-374) Reflecting on Ezrahi’s later ideas regarding cosmological shifts, we can say that science and the epistemology derived from it (causality, transparency, facts) mirror a cosmology characterized by a dichotomous view of humanity and Nature. Autonomous Nature, once indifferent to, or intolerant of, human efforts, became—as a result of being separate and distinct from humanity—a key factor in shaping political, sociocultural, and human boundaries. The adoption of a scientific epistemology and its application to the world of politics did not, therefore, create an “evidence-based” democratic political order, but rather one rooted in a shared political imagination of necessary fictions, which in turn produced a reality based on common sense and public facts.

This understanding matured in *Imagined Democracies* to include creative ideas concerning the importance of the political imagination in the establishment of democracy. In *Imagined Democracies*, Ezrahi reveals the epistemological umbilical relationship between the Enlightenment, the cradle of science, and the establishment of the democratic idea. Inspired by the ideas of the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, Ezrahi sketches a portrait of the democratic imagination, the sources that nourish it, and the power of its influence on reality. He argues that imagination had been pushed out of the political sphere by the tyranny of reason: in the Age of Enlightenment, imagination was seen as an irrational force that acted as an enemy of mental balance and stable social order, and as a feature that characterized political radicalism. The dominant tendency was toward compartmentalization, framing, and ignoring the imagination and other emotions, which were not considered integral to building the political order and establishing moral ethics. Rather, imagination and emotions were an obstacle that had to be overcome in order to achieve political order.

According to the classical liberal approach, the human emotional world must be conquered and excised from the political arena. Indeed, the human inner world was deemed a shaky foundation for the social order, threatening the stability and integrity of the individual and their separate experience.[[375]](#footnote-375) This sense of suspicion toward the imagination repressed its status as a force that shapes politics and society, and in the process also revealed elements of the thinking of Hobbes and Rousseau, who considered the imagination a significant human faculty, and of Vico, who emphasized the power of the imagination to create reality. Drawing on these and other thinkers, Ezrahi shows that the imagination, like other human faculties, can be used to promote contradictory ideas and realities at the level of the individual and of society, regardless of whether one acknowledges its role. Thus, the Enlightenment’s fear of the public political imagination was only partially justified. Indeed, while the political imagination has supported nationalism, fascism, and violence, such as presented by Herder and Sorel, in another incarnation, it has also produced democratic constitutions, freedom, and equality, as expressed in the thought of Locke, Rousseau, and Jefferson.[[376]](#footnote-376)

In this current volume, Ezrahi presents the idea that the democratic political imagination is reflected in a common epistemology, which includes an understanding of linear causality, a distinction between fact and fiction, and a demand for reporting and transparency from the government. The political imagination produces fictions that are necessary for creating the political order. In Ezrahi’s interpretation, thinkers like Hobbes and Rousseau could conceivably say “first I imagine, and then I assert.” In *Leviathan*, Hobbes’ ninth law of nature expresses the necessity of recognizing that “every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature” [[377]](#footnote-377) And Rousseau, with his famous opening words of *The Social Contract*—Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains”[[378]](#footnote-378)—presents the fiction of freedom. However, neither of these constructs are illusions, as they generate an actual reality of political order. This understanding of the necessary fictions that create reality echoes Ezrahi’s earlier ideas about the theater and the machine as constitutive political metaphors.[[379]](#footnote-379) Similar to the performing arts, the existence of democratic politics and institutions depends on the willingness of the audience—that is, the public—to suspend its disbelief in an array of necessary fictions. Among these are: democracy is a form of self-government that has the good of the people at its heart; elections are a collective event in which leaders are chosen and their mandate to act for a certain policy is decided; democracy is a form of government that usually acts according to the decision of the majority; representatives actually represent their constituents; the bureaucracy is guided by the will of the people’s elected officials, who debate factually and dispassionately about public priorities; public policy is not an incoherent patchwork that expresses unstable consequences; power is transparent and citizens are free and equal political agents; and laws express a collective will. However, not all democratic citizens— referred to as “natives of democracy” by Ezrahi—believe in these fictions, or at least not all of the time, and skepticism is also inherent in the democratic political order.

As I have shown in my own work, liberal democracy is the only political order that is able to embrace and contain skepticism, contradictions, ambivalence, and uncertainty. Moreover, these elements are an institutional foundation of democracy. The democratic citizen is required to exhibit what Keats termed “negative capability,”[[380]](#footnote-380) meaning the ability to experience uncertainty and doubt without seeking facts and certainties. Judith Shklar, the prominent political philosopher of liberalism, clarified the challenge inherent in liberalism as follows:

Far from being an amoral free-for-all, liberalism is, in fact, extremely difficult and constraining, far too much so for those who cannot endure contradiction, complexity, diversity and the risks of freedom.[[381]](#footnote-381)

The “negative capability” of citizens—the “natives” of democracy—is reflected in their ambivalent attitudes toward institutions and the political order. William Connolly has termed this the “politics of paradox,” which enables an individual’s continued sense of discomfort in society and their ambivalent position in relation to the democratic political order to be politicized. On the one hand, there is an understanding among individuals that standards, regulations, and restrictions are needed to protect society and maintain the political order. However, at the same time, the political order provides channels for individuals to express a skeptical position toward the existing norms and socio-political order, so that arbitrariness and injustice can be identified.[[382]](#footnote-382) In the democratic political order, citizens participate in shaping the boundaries and limitations of their own freedoms, and at the same time, they are permitted to “take a step back” and question these limitations. It is notable that democracy is the only political order that recognizes the citizens’ need to defend themselves from the political order itself, due to its imperfections, which reflect their own. Indeed, as Montaigne noted: “Our structure, both public and private, is full of imperfections.”[[383]](#footnote-383) Citizens criticize the society, culture, and political order in which they exist, but also share in building these constructs. Only in democracy is there recognition of the constructive power of the dual agent role that citizens play in relation to the political order. The wisdom of this “balance from duality” lies in the fact that it allows citizens to contribute from themselves but not of their selves (to paraphrase Montaigne) and to be a partner without becoming a part.[[384]](#footnote-384) The ability to demonstrate ambivalence toward the democratic political order is a civic virtue that enables citizens to behave as alert political agents—aware, but also distant and reserved. Bolstered by this tolerance for ambivalence, the citizen—and the political order—relinquishes the desire for absolute solutions, the illusion of the possibility of absolute autonomy and self-sufficiency, and the longing for a political order free of conflicts. In fact, tolerance for ambivalence is a necessary virtue in the creation of what the American poet Walt Whitman referred to as the “composite democratic individual,”[[385]](#footnote-385) since democracy is the only political order that requires citizens to become partners in limiting their own freedoms.

Paradoxically, a political system’s ability to contain its citizens’ ambivalence actually invigorates its robustness rather than threatening it. On the face of it, it would seem possible to argue that a modest democracy undermines itself by allowing its citizens to adopt attitudes and practices that might jeopardize their commitment and obedience to the political order. In this sense, democracy has no need to create external enemies because it is its own foe. This stands in stark contrast to a totalitarian political order, which, having no room for internal contradictions, divisions, or tensions, must create external enemies.[[386]](#footnote-386) In fact, the democratic political order ensures its own stability precisely because it takes into account the complicated emotional tendencies of its citizens. Rather than imposing impossible limitations on human psychology, democracy is a political order that institutionalizes it.[[387]](#footnote-387) In contrast, a political order that does not recognize ambivalence and that demands the unqualified commitment of its citizens, will ultimately not only harm individual freedoms but also undermine its own foundations, since no political order has the power to create such a citizen. A political order that imposes impossible limits on individual psychology will not be able to endure for long.

Democracy, in its modest incarnation, is strengthened by the discovery of its ability to contain the ambivalent attitudes of its citizens in relation to boundaries and authority. Indeed, it is the existence of ambivalence—which combines skepticism and irony with commitment and participation—that guarantees a dynamic political sphere. As Ezrahi puts it:

“Irony points to the absurdity of the exalted, the partiality inherent in the pursuit of totality, and the enslavement in adhering uncompromisingly to a sacred idea. Irony acknowledges the multiplicity of perspectives and meanings and the possibility of playing between different viewpoints… Skepticism, emotional and cognitive mobility, oscillation between belief and disbelief are symbols of the liberal-democratic worldview, which places individual freedom of thought at its center. Therefore, irony… comes to liberate the citizen from emotional and conscious ties to messianic politics…. Irony, when directed at authority, comes to strengthen the public against its leaders’ manipulations; it does not come to strengthen and consolidate governmental authority but to puncture it. As such, irony is an important component in the culture of democratic politics, emphasizing the exposure of authority to criticism and pressuring it to be accountable to the public.” [[388]](#footnote-388)

In place of blind obedience, which destroys political life, the combination of commitment and distance, agreement and disagreement, participation and an “ironic wink,” enliven the political sphere. In this sense, ambivalence and the ability to tolerate it, both on the part of the individual and the political order, contain a spark for political action, a spark that is kindled by the power of the individual’s sense of unease.

The disappearance of a feeling of discomfort or, alternatively, a non-ambivalent position towards the political order may serve as a warning sign that individuals have assimilated into the political order to such an extent that they are no longer aware of the limitations on their freedom. Reaching such a point may also signal that irony and skepticism have distanced the individual from society and the political order, and that indifference and alienation have usurped the ambivalence that indicates the existence of intense, opposing emotions, attitudes, and desires toward the political order. However, in times of crisis and revolution, when the balance between skepticism and trust is shaken, we experience what may be termed “epistemological moments,” when common sense is fractured. Now, in place of a non-reflective public trust based on shared imaginaries, a new insight emerges that undermines the existing political order and its symbols. Like the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen’s folk tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, who famously blurts out that the “emperor is naked,” Ezrahi argues that the public may also suddenly see the gap between the imagined splendor of the emperor and his status as a demigod, and his flesh-and-blood human existence. One may also recall Edmund Burke’s words in the wake of the beheading of Louis XVI and the dragging of Marie Antoinette’s mutilated body through the streets of Paris, that “a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman.”[[389]](#footnote-389) Following the experience of the French Revolution, Burke concluded that “All the pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal […] are to be dissolved.”[[390]](#footnote-390)

Ezrahi’s thought does not stop here. This current book can be seen as the third stage of the “journey to the depths” that has allowed him to proffer an original explanation for the epistemological collapse of the Enlightenment and the democratic backsliding we are witnessing today. Ezrahi’s argument here reveals a new layer that goes beyond his previous ideas. Not only did science and democracy unite to shape a shared epistemology, and not only does the political imagination express these epistemological principles and translate them into the common sense shared by all partners in the political order, but these phenomena are themselves the results of a cosmological infrastructure that feeds the political imagination, which in turn creates the political present. The original contribution of this book therefore, beyond that of other studies that identify the imagination as a constitutive force of the social and political collective, lies in understanding the relevance of the cosmological shift to the reshaping of the political imagination and the current crisis in democratic politics. Ezrahi also argues that the political and social imaginations—like the one revealed in the imagined communities that Benedict Anderson identifies as the basis for the existence of the nation state, [[391]](#footnote-391) and like the social imagination outlines by Charles Taylor in his studies,[[392]](#footnote-392) and like the imaginaries of a particular political order (e.g., democracy or monarchy) —grow on a cosmological substratum, the most basic level of the collective imagination.

Indeed, cosmologies are a fundamental layer of imagination. Often unconscious, they include the shared perceptions of a particular culture or civilization regarding the origins of the cosmos, its foundations, and the dynamics of the interrelationships between its various components in space and time. A cosmology is, by its very nature, a stable and continuous infrastructure, one that produces and shapes basic concepts and images of time, causality, authority, interhuman relationships, and relationships between humans and the animate and inanimate worlds. The cosmological fabric has a constitutive effect on shaping the collective political imagination and the nature of the political regime. For the most part, humans operate according to the hegemonic cosmological imaginary of the society into which they were born. Even though this imaginary is what shapes people’s modes of thought and their personal and collective existence, they usually have no direct access to it. By tracing the roots of the naturalistic modern Western cosmology, which is characterized by a “foundational dichotomy between Nature and Culture, world and humanity” (p. 9), Ezrahi establishes the central argument of his book—that the naturalistic modern Western cosmology that began to take shape from the beginning of the seventeenth century was the precondition for the existence and formation of democracy in the West. The dissolution of this cosmology in the final decades of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-firstcenturies has inevitably been reflected in the erosion of the foundations of modern democracy.

To establish his argument, Ezrahi relies on the anthropological studies of Phillipe Descola, which point to our—that is, naturalistic Westerners’—ontological-cosmological blindness, by demonstrating the existence of alternative cosmologies. While the naturalistic system makes a clear distinction between Nature and Culture, and humanity and world, there exist totemistic and animistic cosmologies in which humans are an inseparable part of Nature, the animal kingdom, and even the inanimate world. In these cosmologies, the whole of existence is animated, and the mind permeates everything. The deep recognition that the firm foundations on which we experience and perceive the world are not inevitable also has profound implications for shaping our political imaginaries.

In this book, Ezrahi traces the cosmological transition that has taken place in Western culture, from the monistic, hierarchical, religious cosmology of the Middle Ages, which situated God at its head, to the modern, secular, dualistic, anti-hierarchical cosmology which began to take root in the seventeenth century. The political imagination of the Enlightenment is umbilically linked to this cosmological upheaval, and is based on an alternative “Holy Trinity” of science, progress, and freedom. Inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the recognition of the individual as agent—an idea that stands at the cornerstone of the voluntary human exercise of democratic politics—took shape.[[393]](#footnote-393) However, toward the end of the twentieth century, the new Holy Trinity of science, progress, and freedom that had nourished the epistemology of the democratic political imagination began to fade, as a result of another shift that had occurred in the wake of scientific and technological developments. This time, the shift was from the modern dualistic cosmology to a postmodern secular monism, which blurred the boundaries between the dichotomies of Nature/Culture and humanity/world.

Ezrahi argues that the collapse of the dualistic cosmology that had stood at the cornerstone of modernity has deeply affected how citizens—that is, democratic natives—perceive and understand politics. He shows how the five anchors of the democratic political imagination, some of which he previously identified in *Descent of Icarus*—the invention of the individual as a political agent, political causality, the emergence of public facts, the formation of the norms of visibility and transparency, and the objectification of public policy through science, technology, economics, and law—have been undermined by this cosmological shift.[[394]](#footnote-394) Finally, Ezrahi identifies signs that a new monistic cosmology—one very different from that of the Middle Ages—has now begun to form in the void that was created as a result of the undermining of the dualistic naturalistic cosmology.

As part of this new cosmology, which I have called “HumaNature,” humans came to the realization that they are an inseparable part of Nature, and that their attempts to control it in order to “advance” it—as humanity believed it had been doing for centuries—have brought about the destruction of Nature and humanity alike. The climate crisis is perhaps the most tangible example of this. While it is still too early to predict what epistemology and what political imagination might emerge from this new monistic cosmology, it is possible to identify phenomena that can teach us both about the challenges inherent in it. At best, this is a “modest” cosmology, which views humans as part of the world and of biological and physical processes, albeit with the ability to create and heal other humans thanks to developments in genetics, and to produce artificial intelligence that occasionally surpasses even their own understanding (for example, the phenomenon of deep learning). However, humanity has an obligation to be responsible and modest in how it makes use of these new abilities, so as to avoid bringing about its own annihilation. In light of the scientific and technological developments that are posing a challenge to the dichotomies that had been an integral part of the old dualistic cosmology (and an unshakeable part of modern epistemology), such as the distinction between animate/inanimate, human/artificial, predictable/non-predictable, we must adopt what Jasanoff has called the “technologies of humility,” and reshape the rights, duties, obligations, and needs of living beings in relation to the law and the state.[[395]](#footnote-395)

In this current book, the last of the trilogy, Ezrahi dives to the depths in search of the cosmological roots of the alliance between science and democracy that is the focus of his investigation in *Descent of Icarus*, and of the political imagination that grew from that alliance, a development to which he devoted the second book in the trilogy, *Imagined Democracies*. Here, Ezrahi engages in an original and thought-provoking discussion, where hope is intermingled with fear, regarding the future of democracy and Western culture in general. At the foundation of this current book is Ezrahi’s unique conceptualization of the essence of democratic political order, the roots of which can be found in the idea of eclectic pluralism, first discussed in *Descent of Icarus*.[[396]](#footnote-396) This is a social modus in which there is a cross-fertilizing dynamic between different visions based on multiplicity, diversity, and difference. Eclectic pluralism is at the foundation of a political order that, in my view, is endowed with intellectual humility (modest democracy). This humility emerges from a sense of disillusionment with the phantasm of the Enlightenment, blind faith in the power of science, and the pursuit of instrumental rationality and consistency. Relinquishing the aspiration to create a homogeneous society makes it possible to realize a Utopian freedom that is not constructed in accordance with an *a priori* image of the perfect regime.

At the level of the individual, modest democracy allows citizens to experience a variety of aspects of the human experience, not just the rational, but also the emotional—including the possibility of tolerating the existence of conflicting desires within an individual. To acknowledge the existence of conflicting desires is to allow true inner freedom. This is not the same as Rousseau’s idea of the social contract, which, although also originating in the desires of individuals, is ultimately unable to contain the possibility of the existence of conflicting desires within an individual without submitting to a unified, general will.[[397]](#footnote-397) On a political level, modest democracy limits our ability to realize entire models of society according to one worldview or another, and is therefore based on the principle of the decentralization of power. Ezrahi’s view regarding the basic dynamics of democratic politics matured in his later thinking, after he developed his ideas of political imagination. According to Ezrahi’s concept, democracy can be viewed as a “constructive Utopia” in which, while each person and group has what might be called the “right to dream,” there is a limit to the ability of individuals and groups to realize a collective, coherent, and uniform vision. Ezrahi argues that:

Democracy is a political system that does not tolerate ideological hegemony and therefore encourages every individual and every group to promote their dream of their desired society through peaceful means. Of course, however, due to the multitude of dreams and the dispersion of political power in democracy, no individual or group can expect their dream to come true.[[398]](#footnote-398)

Essentially, democracy confers on individuals and groups the “right to dream” and to strive in non-violent ways to realize their dreams, albeit with the knowledge that there will always be a gap between the ideals of the individual/group and reality. Democratic politics attempt to achieve compromise without compromising the life of the individual, and their purpose is to ensure the continued existence of the individual as a free political agent. The idea of the “right to dream,” and the recognition that the ability to realize a complete, uniform, coherent, and total vision is limited, echoes Lefort’s diagnoses regarding the nature of democratic society, which beyond providing certain answers, also enables questions to be asked:

Democratic society is instituted as a society without a body, as a society that undermines the representation of an organic totality […]. Democracy is instituted and sustained by the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge and as to the basis of relations between *self and other*, at every level of social life […] without the actors being aware of it, a process of questioning is implicit in social practice, that no one has the answer to the questions that arise.[[399]](#footnote-399)

Life in a democratic society requires compromise and balance, but also, I would add, the civic virtue of tolerating internal ambivalence and contradictions. Indeed, the ability to tolerate internal and external contradictions is the key to democratic life and tolerance toward others. The recognition that there is otherness within oneself, what Freud called the uncanny, enables the space for being and tolerance for external otherness.[[400]](#footnote-400) This is also the meeting point between the democratic concept that Ezrahi sketched and the Freudian idea of the self that I explore in my work—the recognition that the ambivalence embedded within the self is an expression of humanity’s commitment to the truth. The love for the truth of the self is the ethical code that accompanies the life of the individual. However, this truth, from both a psychoanalytical and a democratic point of view, is not an absolute truth that demands that one achieve a complete knowledge of one’s self. The self is created through a process of discovery that essentially involves an invention. The self reveals the horizons embedded within it—not those that are predetermined, but those that are imbued with meaning by the very process of human discovery. In other words, one does not discover an *a priori* inner self, but can uncover more and more previously unknown possibilities through a process of exploration and deconstruction. Like the democratic order, the self does not aspire to an absence of internal tensions.[[401]](#footnote-401) The ultimate aim is not an inner life free of conflict, but a modest shift in the relations between the various authorities of one’s inner life that allows the self to be in a state of constantly becoming (*werden*) as Castoriadis emphasizes.[[402]](#footnote-402) This constant state of becoming, the lack of any *a priori* meaning, the ability to contain inner conflict and contradictions from which we derive tolerance for “strangers within” and “strangers without,” is shared by the self as described in Freudian theory and in the democratic political order. This is freedom to create meaning, but this freedom requires us to tolerate disillusionment and have the courage to examine the present. It requires us to abandon our aspirations for a conflict-free social order[[403]](#footnote-403) and our ambitions for a glorious, holistic politics that would endanger the very existence of the individual. As Ezrahi argues:

[F]lesh and blood are no infrastructure for redemptive politics, the vulnerable human body and the life of the individual are the first thing that is in danger when spiritual politics gives a sublime justification for the use of physical force for the moral and ideological engineering of society and the sculpting of history.[[404]](#footnote-404)

There are no guarantees for the continued existence of the democratic political order. As Ezrahi writes, drawing on Lefort, at the core of the democratic system is an empty space, in which there is no power, no religion, no ideology, and no doctrine. In the democratic political order, this empty space serves as a protection as well as a limitation on the individual. It protects the individual from the possibility of being subjected to a collective idea and violent force, but it also limits the possibility of realizing a collective, coherent, uniform vision.[[405]](#footnote-405) This void, which enables the freedom and creativity of the individual and the collective imagination, is shared by politics and music, as described by Ezrahi and Ruth HaCohen (Pinczower) in their joint book, *Composing Power, Singing Freedom*:

“… [S]imilarly to music, the political system hardly ever knows a moment of respite whereby it can be defined from without, or be granted an integrative characterization. Always something bustles, sizzles, fades, turns worlds around and inside out. Even in the great cadential moments of politics, such as at the decisive time of an election campaign—even then, the arena is open to countless alliances, coalitions, interventions and reshufflings. This stems from the fact that, like music, political power springs out, in a certain sense, from a semantic void. This void or vacuity enables and even calls for an alternation and fluid connection with narratives and contents that grant it justification and validity in the dynamic configurations of the political system. This empty space enables political movements and competing ideologies to temporarily fill it through a rotation that allows for each group to give precedence to its values and positions until the dwindling of legitimation and power will compel it to vacate the scene to its rivals who overcome it.[[406]](#footnote-406)

This description also hints at signs of the depletion of the democratic spirit. When there is an attempt to fill the void with a fixed concept that cannot be challenged, or when the current majority behaves as if they will always hold primacy and power, and actively seeks to change the rules of the game to ensure this, the entire democratic vitality described above is in danger—as is the creative human spirit and the intellectual institutions that enable its expression (music, art, academia, civil society).

Today, when democracy and democratic values, in particular human dignity and freedom, face their most serious threat since the eve of World War II, there are nevertheless buds of optimism. Israel, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Turkey, and the United States have seen the mobilization of a broad cross-section of the public, who, disillusioned with the myth that democracy is a given, are prepared to fight for it. In a way, these developments echo what Ezrahi envisions in his book. Under the new, monistic cosmology of *HumaNature*, there is a sense of disillusionment among humanity, not only in relation to our ability to influence Nature (which is currently manifested first and foremost in the climate crisis and in our efforts to mitigate it) but also in relation to the political order. Humanity recognizes that democracy is its own creation, not a gift from God or an immutable law of Nature. While it might be under threat, it is nevertheless within our power to build and fortify it. Perhaps we are witnessing the end of democracy in its Enlightenment incarnation, but this is not necessarily the end of democracy *per se*. Indeed, Ezrahi teaches us that democracy can be saved through a moral-political epistemology of freedom, one that is liberated from naturalistic cosmology and instead nurtures a new imaginary based on the monistic cosmology of *HumaNature*. Democracy is in a constant state of becoming. As Ezrahi declares at the end of his book, it is still a promise.

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1. Yaron Ezrahi, *Can Democracy Recover,* p. XX [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Bungay : Penguin, 1975), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Communities: Necessary Political Fictions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I would like to thank my daughter Talya Ezrahi for her editorial advice on the Introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Benjamin Constant, cited in Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democratic Legitimacy****:*** *Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I understand cosmology as a branch of metaphysics which engages in conceptualizing foundational imaginaries of the world. Further clarification follows in the next chapters. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I have extensively discussed my theory of political imaginaries and their impact on the political order in my book *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012)*.* For now, suffice it to say that political imaginaries result from the ways collectives imagine the totality and structure (monistic, dualistic, hierarchical, and pluralistic) of their respective political universes. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 5Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. and introduction by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 37; 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Phillippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. I should note already at the beginning that there are other "family" versions of dualistic cosmology. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, for instance, prefers a more pluralistic notion of the social side of the dualism discussed by Descola. G.E.R Lloyd joins by stressing cognitive pluralism. See "In Some Sense" by de Castro, in *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* Vol. 35, No 3-4 2010: 318-33. See also Lloyd's *Cognitive Variations: Reflections on the Unity and Diversity of the Human Min*d(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). I will follow Descola's more simplified dualism on account of its greater coincidence with modern imaginaries, it has played a more central role in the rise of modern democratic epistemology. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Mary W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade and Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 53; 75; 78; 166-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On the pervasiveness of the ideal of harmony in Western culture and politics, see Ruth HaCohen (Pinczower) and Yaron Ezrahi's *Composing Power, Singing Freedom*: *Overt and Covert Links Between Music and Politics in the West* ([in Hebrew] Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies*: *Necessary Political Fictions* (see fn. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Whereas historical studies have underscored the many limitations, failures and short life of the first democracy, its powerful ideal persisted up until our time. See Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Edward L. Rubin, *Beyond Camelot: Rethinking Politics and Law for the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007)*,* pp. 9-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Philippe Descola*, Beyond Nature and Culture* (see fn. 7 of this book). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The last couple of sentences were added by RH, in the belief that they are very much in the spirit of the deceased author. For more on this issue see her preface to this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hugo Grotius, "Prolegomena" to *On the Law of War and Peace (1625)*, ed. Oskar Piest, trans. Francis W. Kelsey (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957); see also Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights:*  *Studies on*Natural Rights*,*Natural Law*and Church Law, 1150-1625* (Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*: *Or the Matter, Form and Power of a* *Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (London: Penguin Classics, [c 1651] 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. J.J. Rousseau, *the Social Contract* and *"The Origins of Inequality."* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. and Rousseau's *Emile,* trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J. M. Dent, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Green*,* John Alfred, *The Educational Ideas of H. Pestalozzi (WB Clive 1905)* [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. SeeImmanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Moral*s (Indianapolis: Library of Liberal Arts, [1785], 1959), p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus*: *Science and the Transformation of Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. 22 I would like to note primarily Cornelius Castoriadis' *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*, trans. and ed. D.A. Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)*;* Philippe Descola's *Beyond Nature and Culture;* Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere* (Chicago: HAU Books, 2012) and Geoffrey Lloyd's *Cognitive* *Variations: Reflections* *on the Unity and Diversity of the Human Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Yaron Ezrahi*, Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions*, pp.13-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Michel Heyd, *"Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).  [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ezrahi, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Giambattista Vico, *New Science* (London: Penguin, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lloyd, *Cognitive Variations*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. 28 Brian B. Tierney, *The Idea of*Natural Rights*:*Studies*on* Natural Rights*, Natural*Law*and Church*Law*1150-1625* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies*, Part Two, pp. 83-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Laypeople are more aware of the widespread, outward layers of the collective imagination that derive from hegemonic cosmology, or that are compatible with it, such as ideologies and myths. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Elizabeth Povinelli's article "The Will to be Otherwise/The Effort of Endurance," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (2012):453-75. See also *Framing Cosmologies: The Anthropology of Worlds*, eds. Allen Abramson & Martin Holbraard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Descola, p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture,* pp. 121-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Descola, ibid. pp. 121-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Quoted in ibid. p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Benjamin L. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 350-83; Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*: *A Preliminary Inquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1971). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid. p. 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See essays in *Asian Perceptions of Nature*: *A Critical Approach*, eds. Ole Bruun & Arne Kalland (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Machiavelli, *The Prince, Dedication* (“Niccolò Machiavelli to the Magnificent Lorenzo de Medici”*).* [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid. Chapter 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Principia 941. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Writings, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson, trans. Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1973); Marcelo Dascal, *Leibnitz: Language, Signs and Thought* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Edwin Arthur Burt, *The Metaphysical foundation of Modern Physical Science* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954); also Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954). Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), p. 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Thomas Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth-and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 769. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid. pp. 769-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Vico, *New Science,* p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Giambattista Vico, *On the Study of Methods of Our Time,* trans. Elio Gianturco (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, [1709]), p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* pp. 772 and 775*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Descola, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See correspondent of the Global Post Kathleen McLaughlin's observations in the news hour of PBS on Feb 13, 2012, American East. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Objections to the western understanding of conflict inherent in democratic politics was bound to lead the Japanese to reject ideas expressed in the famous book written by a leading American political scientist, entitled *The Promise of Disharmony*. See Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Published in *The Harvard Educational Review* (1969), the article has triggered the onset of this controversy in the late 1960s. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Yaron Ezrahi, "The Jansen Controversy: A Study in the Ethics and Politics of Knowledge in Democracy," in *Controversies and Decisions*: *The Social Sciences and Public Policy*, ed. Charles Frankel (New York: The Russel Sage Foundation, 1976), pp. 149-70. For further discussion, see also Chapter 4 of the present study. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Sheila Jasanoff and J. Benjamin Hurlbut, A global observatory for gene editing, Nature, 21/3/2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Michael J. Sandel, *The Case against Perfection*: *Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Though there is a deep controversy between liberals and conservatives regarding genetic research in stem cells. See: Pew Research Center, Stem Cell Research at the Crossroads of Religion and Politics, July, 17, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (London: Penguin Random House, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Rafde Bont "'Primitives' and Protected Areas: International Conservation and the 'Naturalization' of Indigenous People ca1910- 1975," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Volume 76, No. 2, April 2015: 214-36. See also John H. Bodley, *Victims of Progress* (Sixth Edition*,* London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful:* *Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid. p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Cited in ibid. p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid. p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Paul Wapner, *Living Through the End of Nature* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Editor’s comment: Following Ezrahi’s triangular claim that basic social values as related to political imaginary of order, are independent of hegemonic cosmology. This could explain the fact that democratic values are resistant to cosmological transformations. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, p. 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid. p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Peter Brown (in a private conversation). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile,* trans. B. Foxley (Dutton, New York: Everyman's Library, [1762] 1977), "Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The First and the Second Discourses,* trans. Roger and Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St Martin's Press, 1964) pp.101-181. See also Alessandro Passerine d'Entrèves*, Natural Law* (London: Hutchison University Library, 1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus,* pp. 29-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, pp. 65- 6 and fn. 4. In the "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx says, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please" (cited in ibid., p. 69, fn.9). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Hall, T.S., 1972, *Treatise of Man*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul,* trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989). For a detailed discussion of Descartes' own qualification of the dichotomy of body and soul, see *Baroque Science* byOfer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), pp. 233-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Charles Taylor, *Sources of The Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 143-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Yaron Ezrahi*, The Descent of Icarus*, pp. 15-8; 29-40; 57-66; 218-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Each of these stating points, obviously leads to a different political path. Liberalism, in its essence, tended to exclude emotions from the political discourse. Ezrahi believed that this repudiation was determinant to its success, especially in late liberal democracies. In competing political paradigms, e.g fascism but also in certain versions of republicanism, the emotional resources have been greatly exploited whether for adoration of the political leader or for enhancing national solidarity (editor’s comment). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul,* p. 341. See also Ofer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris, *Baroque Science,* pp. 233-52; Ruth Katz and Ruth HaCohen, *Tuning the Mind: Connecting Aesthetic Theory to Cognitive Science,* New Brunswick: NJ: Transaction, 2003, pp. 21-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. 74 Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.1951), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See Heidi Morrison Ravven, "Spinoza's Anticipation of Contemporary Affective Neuroscience" in *Consciousness & Emotions* Vol 4 (34), No. 2, 2003: 257-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Michael Heyd, "*Be Sober and Reasonable": A Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 127*.* Lionel Laborie argues that Meric Casaubone's *Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1656) "is a classic example of Anglican anti-puritanism in the Interregnum…that echoed his belief in the interdependence of the body and the soul" in *Enlightening Enthusiasm: Prophecy and Religious Experience in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Manchester University Press: 2015), p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Michael Heyd, ibid. chapters 2 and 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ibid. p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See my *The Descent of Icarus* Chapter 7, on Social science and the Liberal-Democratic Problem of Action, pp. 167-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Editor’s note: Here naturalism is opposed to voluntarism, in the sense that naturalism represents the deterministic view on human existence as embedded in its physicality. Previously in this book, Naturalism was mentioned as the dominant western cosmological mode as defined by Descola. See p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Raymond Bauer, editor, *Social Indicators* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1966). See also *Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement,* Vol 135, Issue 3, 2018: 1009-1019. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. See discussion in *The Descent of Icarus*, pp. 265-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Jonathan Garb, *Yearnings of the Soul*: *Psychological Thought in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 4-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 443. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience Victoria to Freud* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Descola, p. 55; see also Joseph l. Sax, *Mountains without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. The idea of the sublime originated, of course, in aesthetics (Burke, Kant).On Longinus' Peri Hupsos or On Sublimity, written in the first century A.D., see <http://aestheticsrhodesfall09.blogspot.com/2009/11/longinus-burke-and-kant-origins-of.html>. See also Taylor, 305-390. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid. p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Linda Nochlin, *Style and Civilization: Realism* (New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Japanese Civilization*: *A Comparative View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) pp. 326 385*;* Descola, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Eisenstadt, pp. 332-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid. and p. 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Melba Winthrop, with introduction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Seyyed Hussein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978) p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Wael Abu-Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab World****:*** *Concepts and**Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid. pp. 110-111, 186-187. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Ibid. p. 103 and actually the entire book. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Edward C. Banfield, *Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press, 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism* (London: Paul Elek, 1977), p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. See Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1964), p.187; Stanley Hoffmann*,* [Charles P. Kindleberger](http://www.hup.harvard.edu/results-list.php?author=4715), [Laurence William Wylie](http://www.hup.harvard.edu/results-list.php?author=3044), [Jesse R. Pitts](http://www.hup.harvard.edu/results-list.php?author=17574), [Jean-Baptiste Duroselle](http://www.hup.harvard.edu/results-list.php?author=17349), [François Goguel](http://www.hup.harvard.edu/results-list.php?author=17399)*, In Search of France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 9; Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus*, p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. James Sterling Young*, The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 58-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid. p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 39:3 (1982): 401-441; here, pp. 403-405; 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style,” p. 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid, pp. 438-441. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands*: *Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937). [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. I think that despite their qualifications, Sheehan and Wahrman overemphasize the affinity they find between conceptions of self-regulation in Paine and Burke. Ibid. Chapter 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. *The Thomas Paine Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 54; 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. *Paine Reader*, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Ibid. pp. 262-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. *The Invisible Hand*, p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Ibid. p. 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Yaron Ezrahi, "Democracy as a Constructive Utopia" in *The Elections in Israel, 2013*, ed. MichalShamir (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 2015), pp.17-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Claude Lefort, Democracy *and Political Theory,* trans. David Macey *(*Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies*, pp. 84-85, 39-40, 94, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Yaron Ezrahi, "Einstein and the Light of Reason" in *Albert Einstein: Historical and Cultural Perspectives,* eds. Gerald Holton and Yehuda Elkana (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982) pp. 263-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. For the difficulty of assimilating physics' theoretical entities in common sense, see the counter-intuitive description of the entanglement phenomena in contemporary physics. Also Francis Matthew, "Quantum entanglement shows that reality can't be local" *Ars Technica*, Oct. 30, 2012; Juan Yin et al., "Bounding the speed of 'spooky action' at a distance" *Physical Review Letters* Lett.110. 260407, (2013.( [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans., with an Introd. By Lewis White Beck (The Liberal Arts Press: 1959), pp. 54-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Hobbes, *The Leviathan,* Chapter 4, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. On imaginaries of facts in the framework of modern common sense as influenced by science, see Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies*,and Chapter 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Jürgen *Habermas*, The *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Berger withFrederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991) and Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus*, pp. 77-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. See Douglas John Casson, *Liberating Judgment Fanatics, Skeptics, and John Locke's Politics of Probability* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); also Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus,* pp. 78; 84-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); David A. Hollinger, "T.S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and its Implications for History," *American Historical* *Review*, 78 (2), April 1973: 370-93; John D. Heyl, "Paradigms in Social Science," *Society* 12 (July-August 1975) Issue 5: 61-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies,* Chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1958), pp. 24-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. On elections, see my *Imagined Democracies*, pp.159-75 and also Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.* [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Editor’s note: See also the analysis of Norris and Inglehart of who votes for authoritarian-populist parties?. in: Pippa Norris and Roland Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 257-293. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Yaron Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies*, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Nelson Goodman*, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co.,1968) pp. 32*;* 36-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Cited in Yaron Ezrahi's "Science and the Problem of Authority in Democracy" In Scienceand SocialStructure: A Festschrift for Robert K. Merton, in *Transactions of The New York Academy of Sciences,* series II, Vol. 39 (New York 1980), p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Robert K. Merton, *"The Sociology of Science,* *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, ed. Norman Storer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 276-77. And see chapter 10 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. See Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 17-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. “Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!’ (Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, Chapter 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Michael Kammen, *A Machine that would Go of Itself*: *The Constitution in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016)*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Yaron Ezrahi*, Descent of Icarus,* pp. 45; 49; 50; 100; 144-45; 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See the case of Lowell Massachusetts, about the degradation and exploitation of young female workers at the textile mills in John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machines: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump,* Chapter V, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. David Gooding, "In Nature's School: Faraday as an Experimentalist" In *Faraday Rediscovered: Essays on the life and Work of Michael Faraday* (1791-1867), eds. David Gooding & Frank A. L. James (Basingstoke, N.Y.: Stockton Press, 1985), pp. 105-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. James Gleick, *Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. 428. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus*, pp. 13; 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. John Rawls, *a Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971). Notice, in particular, Rawls' "difference principle," according to which inequalities in the distribution of goods are defensible only if they benefit the least well-off groups in society. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Melvin Pollner, *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Ibid. p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Ezrahi, *Imagined Democracies*, p. 50. Note also the role of Montaigne's *Essays* (1588) and of John Donne's poetry (1610) "all coherence gone" (from *An Anatomy of the World*) in setting the grounds for the skepticism that enabled the cosmological shift of modernity and was greatly exacerbated thereof.   [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torch books, 1977), pp. 115-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Giovanni Sartori, "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology" in *Politics and the Social Sciences*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New York, 1969), pp. 66-9; Ezrahi*, Imagined Democracies*, Part 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, pp. 59-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Yaron Ezrahi, *Words and Works in the Social Iconography of Scientific Knowledge: A Study in Science as a Cultural System* (unpublished manuscript, Jerusalem, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. G. E. Madaus, A. E. Raczeck and M. M. Clarke, "The Historical and Policy Foundations of the Assessment Movement," by in *Assessment for Equity and Inclusion: Embracing Our Children,* ed. A. Lin Goodwin (New York: Routledge, 1997), Chapter 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. See Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus* on the "apolitical virtues of engineers in America," pp. 143-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. See ibid. chapters 5 and 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Kenneth Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. See fn. 150 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Frederick Taylor invented "scientific management" based on the application of engineering concepts of time measures of efficiency to management and control of workers. Not surprisingly, popular in Lenin's Russia and early twentieth-century Germany, this system was influential during the first three decades of twentieth-century America and lost much of its luster following the charge that it dehumanized the workers. Charlie Chaplin's famous movie *Modern Times* (1936) was a satire, in the spirit of Marx, on this approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. "Machine politics" refers to a strict hierarchical group ruled and disciplined by a boss, usually in election campaigns. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Cited inJonathan Sheehan & Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands, Self-organization at the Eighteenth Century,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) p. 280. See also Paddy Bullard's *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Michael Kammen, *A Machine that Would Go of Itself: The Constitution in American Culture* (New York*:* Knopf Inc., 1986)*;* Ezrahi*, The Descent of Icarus,* p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. For the case of the balloon flights, which validated Lavoisier's theory of invisible gases to the masses, see the preceding chapter and fn. 144. Not un-similar television documentation of 20th century space flights enhanced popular appreciation of Newtonian physics. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. See discussion in The Descent of Icarus, pp.149-166. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011)*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Robert K. Merton, the prominent American sociologist of science, had argued that "disinterestedness" has been established as a central norm of scientific practice, congenial for the public willingness to believe in the integrity of scientists. This norm has been ostensibly adopted by nonscientific professions as well. Needless to say, in light of the central role of economists in guiding governmental economic policy, the claims of disinterestedness and detachment by economists are far more difficult to defend. See Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968 [enlarged edition]), pp. 612-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*: *Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. The popular rational used by economists to justify unprogressive taxation to attract investments or to promote economic growth is a case in point. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Amos Tversky, who died on June 1996, was a close associate of Daniel Kahneman for many years and was credited by the Nobel Committee which granted the prize to Kahneman on 2002 for his critical contribution to their path-breaking research. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. John Dunn, *Democracy: A History* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005), p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Catherine A. Lugg, *Kitsch: From Education to Public Policy* (Routledge: London, [1999], 2014), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Adam Smith was a Scottish economist, philosopher and author, as well as a moral philosopher, a pioneer of political economy. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. David Ricardo was an English economist who made important contributions to the formulations of the science of economics. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Malthus was an English cleric and scholar, known for his theory that human population increases faster than food supply. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Michael Zakim, *Accounting for Capitalism*: *The World the Clerk Made* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018) pp. 58; 84-8. Though Zakim’s study account mainly for 19th century USA here he refers to the Western world in general. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Ibid. pp. 167-68; see, for his contribution to the above insight, "Population of the US in 1860," compiled from the 8th census by J. Kennedy (Government Printing Office, 1864). [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Albert O. Hirschman; *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), cited in p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Ibid., p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 386. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. With an Introd. by George Schwab (The University of Chicago Press: 1996), p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press [1944] 2001), p.107. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Bruno Latour, An Inquiry into Modes of Existence, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. The economic supplement of the leading liberal and oldest Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Paul Krugman, "Challenging the Oligarchy," *The New York Review of Books,* December 17, 2015: 16-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Thomas Piketty, *Capital* *in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 574-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. "The economists go to battle to save the reputation of their Profession," *The Marker, Ha'aretz,* July2, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Omer Schwartz, " Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936): Interpretation, Society and the Detective Story” (unpublished PhD dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Jerome Frank, *Law and the Modern Mind* (Garden City, NY.: Anchor Books, 1963).

     On legal instrumentalism, see P.S. Atiyah and Robert S. Summers, *Form and Substance in Anglo-American Law: A Comparative Study of Legal Reasoning, Legal Theory and Legal Institutions,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)*;* Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Critical Legal Studies Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus,* pp. 208-16 and *Imagined Democracies: Necessary Political Fictions*, pp. 66, 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Judith Shklar, *Legalism: Law, Morals and Political Trials* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 33-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Reflections*: *Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Ibid. p. 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Democracy, Power and Imperialism in Fifth-Century Athens," in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, ed. J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach & Josiah Ober (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 124-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Shklar, *Legalism*, Preface, p. x. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on*Natural Rights*,*Natural Law*, and Church Law, 1150-1625* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Gottfried Dietze, "Natural Law in the Modern European Constitutions," in *Natural Law Forum*, Notre Dame Law School, Vol I, No. 1 (1956): 73-91; here, pp. 75-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Shklar, p.86. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. "The Legacy of Kuhn" in *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Ibid., p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. E. W. Wigner, "Remarks on the Mind-Body Question," in *The Scientist Speculates,* ed. I. J. Good (London: Heinemann, 1962).  [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. I have no competence to take sides in the lively debate among geologists and other earth scientists on the precise periodization of Holocene and Anthropocene. For our purpose, suffice it to note the acceleration of the human impact on our planet and the physical fabric of our life from the late eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution through the second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914), and the technological revolution throughout the twentieth century. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Dona Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Haim Hazan, *Against Hybridity: Social Impasses in a Globalizing World* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. The illusion of direct eye contact between the figures on the television screen and the eyes of the television viewers has been facilitated by ignorance of the many eyes that participated in the creation of these figures from cameramen through editors to a large number of technicians. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See ”Can Democracy Recover: Concluding Reflections” in the present book. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. See the quote and the discussion in Ezrahi's *Imagined Democracies*, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. JoséCasanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. T*he Descent of Icarus,* pp. 1-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. A phrase from *The Evil Empire of Everything,* the twelfth album by hip-hop group Public Enemy, released on October 1, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Clifford Geertz, *"*Common Sense as a Cultural System,*"* in *Antioch Review,* Vol. 33 no.1*,* (1975: 5-26). [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. E.A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1954). [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump,* pp. 67; 71-2; 77 (see fn. 133). [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society (1667)* (St. Louis, Washington University Studies, 1958), p. 90**.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Theodor Porter, *Trust in Numbers* (see fn.134). [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. "'Alternative facts' is a phrase used by U.S. Counselor to the President, Kelly Anne Conway, during a Meet the Press interview on January 22, 2017, in which she defended White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's false statement about the attendance numbers of Donald Trump's inauguration as President of the United States." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative facts [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. The paradox arises from the false expectation that, with respect to any issue or "reality claim," there is only one set of valid facts. But as historians and social scientists have long understood, neither reality nor facts are a given. Both are either derivative of explicit or implicit theories or alternative interpretations. Historian of quantum mechanics Mara Beller has shown how factual claims differ with the theoretical perspectives from which they are derived. See Mara Beller, *Quantum Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.179-181. Still, the case shows the difference between mere “alternative facts” and factual claims of the kind discussed above, which are defendable by means of valid theories. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Sorroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy & Sinan Aral, "The Spread of true and false news online" *Science*Vol. 359: 1146-1151 (2018). I owe this reference to Michael Kubovy**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Gordon Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteen Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly,* series III, 39 (3): 402-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. James Sterling Young, The *Washington Community* *1800-1828* (see Chapter 5, fn. 109 in this book). [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Gordon Wood, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. See the case of Julia Berkovitch, economic supplement of the Israeli Daily Ha'aretz, *the MARKER*, October 24/2018 p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Elihu Katz, *Rediscovering Gabriel Tarde* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); [Elihu Katz](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&text=Elihu+Katz&search-alias=books&field-author=Elihu+Katz&sort=relevancerank), [Christopher Ali](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_2?ie=UTF8&text=Christopher+Ali&search-alias=books&field-author=Christopher+Ali&sort=relevancerank) and [Johan Kim](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_3?ie=UTF8&text=Joohan+Kim&search-alias=books&field-author=Joohan+Kim&sort=relevancerank), *Echoes of Gabriel Tarde: What We Know Better or Different 100 Years Later* (USC Annenberg Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. See chapters 14-15 of Arlie Russel Hochschild's *Strangers in their Own Land* (New York: The New Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. 209Ibid. p. 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and The Second Discourses*, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Yaron Ezrahi," Einstein and the Light of Reason" in *Albert Einstein: Historical, and Cultural Perspectives,* ed. Jerold Holton and Yehuda Elkana (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Heidegger, "*The Age of the World Picture*" (See Chapter 9, fn. 159 of this book). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. For a detailed analysis of Einstein's argument, see Yaron Ezrahi, ibid. pp. 256-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. By visual minorities or majorities, I mean the differences between visual orientations of majority versus those of minority groups as an aspect of their alternative cultural-political assumptions. The profound differences in America between the ways creationists and evolutionists regard evidence of the genealogy of humans is one example. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. See my *Descent of Icarus*, Science and the transformation of contemporary democracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Note Lewis Mumford, *Techniques and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1934). Note also Karl Marx's famous critique of technology in *Capital*, Vol. I: *A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1967); see, especially, Chapter 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Ellis Erle, *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Davies Jeremy, *the Birth of Anthropocene* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Editors’ note: Here Ezrahi had already forecasted later extreme developments that shock Israel in 2023, when the ruling extreme right-wing coalition headed by PM Netanyahu initiated a series of laws aiming to politicize the courts and limit their power. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Yaron Ezrahi, "1977" in *Les Juifs et le* XXème siècle*, Dictionnairie critique* (Calmann*-*Lévy, 2000), pp. 782-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. I want to thank my son Ariel Ezrahi for his significant contribution to this part. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Vico, *New Science.* [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
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258. A Defense of Liberty against Tyrant*s, Vindiciae contra Tyrannos (1579): Of the Lawful Power of the Prince over the People and of the People over the Prince,* by Julius Brutus (Wipf and Stock: New York, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
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394. Parts 2 and 3 of Ezrahi’s current book outline how the naturalistic cosmology centered on the Human/Nature dichotomy established the epistemological anchors of the Enlightenment, while part 4 of the book is, as it were, a lateral inversion of these first parts, where Ezrahi follows the disintegration of these anchors as a result of the undermining of the dualistic naturalistic cosmology. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Jasanoff further noted that: “As biology crosses conceptual boundaries that have long been foundational to legal thought—between life and non-life, human and non-human, individual and collective, predictable and non-predictable, we see coming into play a profound rethinking of the rights, duties, entitlements, and needs of living entities in relation to law and the state.” John Templeton Foundation. (2023, January 10). *The Recentered Human.* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV6OQtUw-zE [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
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