

Opening Debate

Six Characters in Search of Democracy

It was strange to meet up again after all those years. This is what Jonathan Towers, Victoria Timberland, and Harry Foster thought when they ran into one another at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the university where they had met up. They had last met in June 1995, at the graduation ceremony of Jonathan, who was the last of their gang to receive his much-coveted degree.

Immediately, they were reminiscing about their Politics and Democracy student reading group, which had convened many times in Harry's office, who was then a university lecturer in political philosophy, as indeed he still was. Right then and there, Victoria took it upon herself to invite all six participants in their reading group of yesteryear – including Diana Pinion, Selma Greenwood, and Roderick Blue – for a reunion at her home.

'That's a great idea,' is what Harry said. 'Not only is it fifteen years since we last saw each other but the problems we discussed at the time are still topical issues. The problems with democracy and politics have only got worse, at all levels: local, national, and international.'

'You haven't changed a bit, have you,' Jonathan said teasingly. 'You still take a dim view of everything, but I happen to see all sorts of positive developments. Take the democratic potential of the Internet ...'

'Let's have this discussion when Selma, Diana, and Roderick are present,' Victoria interjected. 'I'm offering you the use of my home and I'll arrange for all six of us to be there.'

And so, one sunny Saturday afternoon, there they were, assembled in the living room of Victoria's perfectly maintained thirties home. The crucifix above the door hinted that Victoria had remained faithful to the Catholic tradition. During her student years, she had been actively involved in the Catholic Student Society, first as the president of the rag week committee

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and subsequently as chair of the entire society. Now she had been active as a parliamentarian for five years, positioning herself as ‘social-conservative’.

With her grey woman’s suit and her hair gathered up in a bun, Victoria looked more advanced in years than Harry, who, at 49, was in fact ten years her senior. Harry had not changed much. In Victoria’s memory, Harry wore a black corduroy jacket and jeans faded at the knees even back then. Harry had remained a bachelor, and had but few enduring relations at work. Supervising student reading groups was what he enjoyed most, and the group that was meeting up again today had always remained the most special one to him. And yet, he was a bit apprehensive about the renewed acquaintance with former students like Jonathan, who, he felt, exhibited their social success with far too much exuberance.

On the occasion of the university’s anniversary celebrations, Jonathan had told Harry he worked for a consultancy firm in the IT branch and dashed from one customer to another in his leased BMW. As a student, Jonathan had been actively involved in a great many clubs and societies simultaneously, including a student investment club and a liberal youth organization. With his expensive ‘smart casual’ clothing, he still looked every inch the man about town, though being a father of two had steadied him somewhat.

With great anticipation, Victoria had looked forward to meeting Selma, Diana, and Roderick, to whom she had only spoken about the reunion on the phone. Three very different characters these were.

Selma had always kept Victoria at arm’s length. In her student years, Selma had been actively involved not only in the Politics and Democracy reading group, but also in the Power and Gender women’s reading group. She had been the driving force behind the student party called Counterweight at the university council. Selma, who had grown up in a liberal Protestant family in the suburbs, had meanwhile spent a good many years living in an alternative-living commune in the inner city. What with her purple hairdo and ditto T-shirt proclaiming No Such Luck, she stood out in stark contrast to Victoria’s floral-patterned four-seater sofa. Sitting on the floor with a cup of green tea in front of her, she told them that, as a freelance journalist, she wrote articles for various journals dealing with the environment and human rights.

Roderick was sitting next to Selma, just up on the sofa, with a leather-cased writing pad on his lap. He had told Victoria that Saturdays were inconvenient for him, what with family commitments and church-board obligations: Roderick came from an orthodox Protestant background. But, as Victoria had more or less expected, he had shown up after all. He had

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never been one for no-show in the old days and always kept close track of their discussions, using his experience as the secretary of the Christian Student Union. This experience served him well in his current position as secretary of an agricultural association.

Diana was the last to arrive, an hour later than any of the others, which hardly surprised anyone. Diana had always been a bit of a muddler. After an unhappy student love affair, she had moved in with a retired lawyer, who was keen to foster Diana's passion for gardening. Diana had never found a proper job, and had never looked for one either, if truth be told. She preferred to be by herself. But she was an avid reader of absolutely anything and had indeed managed to surprise the members of the reading group on several occasions. Most of the time, however, she was a still water, which all too often led to her being underrated.

Having supplied everyone with coffees, teas, and chocolate cakes – which used to be her customary treat – Victoria radiantly took the floor: 'Dear friends, we haven't met for fifteen years and that's just yonks too long. We had such an interesting reading group under your capital chairmanship, Harry, and wouldn't it be wonderful if we could find a way to continue it in some way ...'

'Yes, for democracy is not doing at all well,' Harry added. 'Vital democracy has all but vanished. At all levels, local, national, and international, the vital juices are leaking away ...'

'And Jonathan – look at him scowling – has different ideas about it than you do, Harry, and Diana disagrees with Selma; look at them both gasping for air, ha ha,' Victoria laughed. 'But, to be serious, I feel everyone should have their say. How about me kicking off?' As no audible protests were heard, Victoria proceeded.

'In all those years in politics, I've come to realize that the main problem is that representative democracy is losing its support base. I feel this is unjustified. Representative democracy is the most subtle and successful political system of all time: that's what I read somewhere when I was preparing this day and I agree with it wholeheartedly. Democracy simply works the best when elected politicians are given the scope to do their work, which is to be politicians or governors on behalf of others. This is a profession, just like baking bread is a profession; it's best to leave it to professionals who have specialized in it.'

'Well, I hope you don't mind,' Jonathan said, 'but I'm afraid your metaphor is a bit wonky. You can learn how to bake bread according to traditional methods in bakers' school, but there is no school where you get a pass or fail for making good policies. All the time, I see politicians on the

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telly and think to myself: “How did you get there, and how are we going to get you out of there?” And, of course, you would answer, Victoria, “in the elections,” but you know just as well as I do that we only have elections once every so many years.’

‘And just for appearances’ sake,’ Harry interpolated. ‘People cast their vote in the ballot box and then have to wait and see what their vote does in terms of policy-making. Not a lot, usually.’

‘You too, Brutus?’ Victoria laughed. ‘I agree with you in part, Harry. Elections may give off a weak signal, but that depends on the way they are staged. If they are well organized, and properly used, they give off a crystal-clear signal. The government party either gets a new majority vote or it loses its majority. The prime minister in office gets another mandate to govern and put together his government team, or he gets to pack his bags. And I cannot quite agree with you, Jonathan, that having elections once every so many years is a problem. You should be able to take the governors’ measure at the end of their ride, but, while they’re en route, they should be given the opportunity to govern. Which is not the case in some countries, and in the European Union, where everyone has their hands on the wheel all along the ride, and, when it’s over, you have no idea who should be held responsible for what.’

This was the moment for Roderick to put down his pen. ‘Well, well, you’re cutting a few corners here, it seems to me. I work as a secretary with an organization that, as you put it, likes to have its hands on the wheel. As do other organizations, by the way, representing industry, for instance, or organizations that claim to be good for the environment. All these organizations seek influence. All this produces a lot of talk, which may be difficult and tedious but is actually very useful. Do you think, Victoria, that these politicians of yours have any idea what policy-making and implementation really involves? Politicians can only do their work properly when they are being fed by civil society organizations and collaborate very closely with them, for that’s where the real expertise is.’

‘Well, Roderick,’ said Victoria, grimacing slightly, ‘once, I thought like you, but since I’ve been in Parliament, I’ve changed my view, particularly owing to talks with a few of my seasoned colleagues. I’m talking about very good parliamentarians. They make sure they’re informed by all sorts of social organizations, but they have very strict views on their own responsibility. One of them pointed out to me the famous letter by Edmund Burke to the voters of Bristol; I’ve got it right here, let me quote it to you: “Parliament is a deliberate assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole – where not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good.” Or here: “You choose a member, indeed, but

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when you have chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a Member of Parliament.” ’

‘That’s the essence of the British model of democracy,’ Harry said in a voice that brought out the teacher in him. ‘There’s also the model that Roderick seems to favour. In my field, this is called “consensus democracy”, or “consociational democracy”, which is one of its subspecies. And the model Victoria mentioned is called “Westminster democracy”, after the political centre to which it owes its name. Or “pendulum democracy” after the swinging back and forth that’s common to this system: now there’s one party in power, now another. The political scholar Arend Lijphart calls Westminster democracy a “majoritarian democracy” because a simple majority of 50+1 will swing decisions in Parliament, whereas, in a consensus democracy, people try to find the widest possible base for policies, preferably outside the formal representative bodies too.’

‘Indeed, this is a very interesting treatise on democratic thought, professor, but where in all of this scheme does Harry Foster himself stand?’ said Jonathan, not bothering to suppress a look of daring on his face.

‘Oh well,’ said Harry, without looking at Jonathan, ‘actually I agree with Schumpeter, who once said that “the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede”. Voters have a herd instinct, so I wouldn’t set my hopes too high. It’s a blessing in disguise that we only have general elections once in a while. Schumpeter believed in competing elites, who would have to bid for the voters’ favour in general elections. The winner then pulls all the strings: the winner takes all. This is heading the way of your pendulum model, Victoria. Schumpeter even radicalizes it. If I were put with my back to the wall, I’d prefer this model to Roderick’s consensus model of endless talk. But I can’t take such an untroubled view of the electoral process as you do, Victoria. One cannot expect too much of it. It’s an exceptional thing to find the right man for the job, someone who really rises above everybody else.’

‘Someone like you, I suppose, a “philosopher-king” who takes the common mob by the hand with his superior knowledge and understanding.’ All eyes turned to Selma, who had obviously been getting into a bit of a stew on the carpet. ‘I’ve really been listening to this discussion with growing amazement! Do any of you actually have any idea what “democracy” means? Democracy literally means rule by the people. Democracy is meant to be an antidote to systems that keep the people under their thumb. Where are the people in your stories? With Harry, they’re a mob that needs to be kept under control. With Victoria, they’re a herd of cattle, led to the ballot once in a while to make their mark. What the people are with Roderick I’m not

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sure; the rank and file of interest groups like the AA, I suppose, who say they speak on behalf of large groups of people but in actual fact only defend the interests of the asphalt lobby. You patronize organizations that “claim to be good” for the environment, Roderick, but at least such organizations make a stand for suppressed interests. At least they haven’t firmly ensconced themselves on the lap of the elite.’

‘Nor have we,’ said Roderick, stony-faced. ‘The organization I work for has a wide-ranging conception of agricultural interests, which includes both ecological values and the socio-economic interests of farmers, rich and poor, and involves keying these to other relevant interests.’

‘And that’s just how they’ve phrased it in their annual report, isn’t it?’ said Selma sardonically.

‘Yes, they have actually, Selma, and it’s also everyday practice. You can take it from me that many more members get to have their say at our annual meeting than they do at the meetings of all those environmentalist groups of yours. In practice, these turn out to be rather elitist clubs, with fancy talk about democratic decision-making and the people’s rights and interests, all the while blurring on whose behalf they actually speak. On behalf of their ten- euro-a-year members who sign their payment slips to buy themselves a clean conscience? These clubs don’t care one straw for “rule by the people”, you know.’

‘Yes, Selma, Roderick’s got a point there,’ said Victoria. ‘On whose behalf do these pressure and action groups of yours actually speak?’

‘As if those political parties of yours were so broad-based,’ Selma riposted. ‘Political party membership has been dwindling year by year and is now way below the membership figures of organizations such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International, and I have a lot more time for them than for those shrivelled political parties of yours. But actually I don’t want to talk about these big organizations. To me, democracy is something that’s built from the bottom up, from the base. As I tried to say earlier on, democracy means that “the people rule” and that, in its turn, means that those who are involved in something must also be fully involved in decision-making about it. To me, democracy without direct participation of those involved is not democracy. That goes without saying, doesn’t it?’

‘Well, does it really?’ Roderick objected. ‘If you’re dealing with complicated things embracing – let’s say – traffic, agriculture, the environment, and spatial planning, isn’t it impossible to involve all parties concerned in decision-making? It makes much more sense to put expert representatives of the interests involved round the table, doesn’t it? Direct democracy is all very well, but it’s impracticable when you’re dealing with comprehensive issues, which virtually all important issues are. Participation in decision-making may

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have its uses – naturally, we also keep in touch with our constituencies – but we shouldn't be taking it too far.'

'Of course the people should be involved in government in a democracy, but that doesn't mean that everyone should always be involved in everything,' Harry lectured. 'If the people can appoint their rulers and dismiss them, the people also rule and this is, in fact, a democracy. You are in favour of maximum feasible participation of all concerned, Selma, which was the ideal of authors such as Pateman and Poulantzas in the 1970s. I'm more inclined towards minimally required participation. My idea of democracy is far from ideal, but your idea of democracy is terrifying to me: the terror of those who out-yell the others. I can't see myself as Plato's philosopher-king at all – being just an academic – but I agree with Plato that the head is higher than the gut, rather than the other way around.'

Jonathan looked flabbergasted. 'Well, isn't this just a load of paternalistic and morbid claptrap! As if citizens hadn't got better educated and more assertive in recent times. As if we hadn't gone through technological revolutions that have increasingly enabled people to look after themselves. Your view of man is a negative one, Harry, and it's one I don't share at all. I'm not with Selma on all counts, but I do agree that democracy and patronization don't go together. Nor do I see why we should call it democracy when people are not empowered to look after themselves and have to put up with other people's condescension until the next general elections, which don't really matter much anyway.'

'Not if they're well organized!' 'So what would be your solution then?' Victoria and Roderick butted in so rapidly that Jonathan continued with a smile. 'Let me start with you, Victoria, because I in fact agree with you that elections could and should be better organized. The question, though, is how, and that's where we disagree. You want a transparent system for appointing rulers, who you would then give every scope to do whatever they plan to do. I want a user-friendly system that enables citizens to defend their interests and that enables them to keep those rulers of yours on their toes. Today's information and communication technology offers a wealth of opportunities: Internet referendums, digital polling, what have you. Computerized voting once every four years is all very well, but modern information technology should actually be used to monitor opinions and preferences every day. Teledemocracy is the future. Bill Gates and Nicholas Negroponte have more to say about the future of democracy than Plato, Pateman, Lijphart, and all the rest of them. The Internet revolution has turned everything upside down. With a PC and an Internet connection, you can turn every living room into a boardroom! Which, incidentally, also

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tells you, Roderick, what my solution would be for making democracy do a better job.'

'But you haven't managed to convince me yet,' said Roderick. 'There's a lot the computer can do, but I wonder if people really want all those things the computer's capable of doing. I can't somehow see my neighbours switching on their computers at night and steeping themselves in the digital polls of the day. I can't imagine them surfing the net evening after evening to search for all the information they need to make sensible decisions. They prefer to leave that to others: to politicians, civil servants, and other professionals, who already spend full days working on public matters.'

'There's an even more fundamental objection,' said Harry. 'Jonathan suggests that individual citizens would benefit from having a digital ballot box at home, but nothing is further from the truth: they would put themselves at much greater risk of being trampled on by the herd. Don't forget that, in referendums, the majority, who go for option A, are the winners, and the minority, who want option B, are the losers and are left empty-handed. That's OK if you happen to be with the winners for once, but you may just as well be voted down next time. You didn't really think that those individualistic, assertive citizens of yours were waiting to have such a sword of Damocles over their heads, did you?'

'And do you think that rulers are willing to support changes like that? You know, don't you, that they'll never be prepared to surrender any of their power, unless it's forced down their throats by massive protest,' said Selma, her gaze averted from Victoria's flushed face.

Before Jonathan went on, he stared ahead in thought for a few seconds: 'What you describe, Harry, may indeed be a risk, but I believe something can be done about it. You could agree that certain issues require extra large majorities and that other issues simply don't qualify for majority voting, when genuine individual interests or basic rights are at issue, for example. I feel that the right and the possibility to defend your own interests is essential, and that's what I would want to use ICT for. I need to do a bit more thinking about Internet referendums ... but digital polling seems very useful to me! Actually, it's just like doing market research with modern technology: establishing people's preferences, investigating the demand, and tailoring your supply to match demand.'

'Demand? Supply? We're talking about democracy here, not about a biscuit factory!' Selma resumed where she'd left off. 'You're turning to technology for a solution, Jonathan, but what we need is a fundamental change of mind. And there'll be none of that if we all get glued to our computers. If we really want to have fundamental democratization, we

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should rally round and take a stand on our rulers. That's the only way to enforce democratization and promote the rise of a new generation of politicians, a more open generation, genuinely prepared to listen to citizens. Listening carefully to each other, trying to work it out together, through consultation and argumentation, in a power-free dialogue: this is democracy according to Habermas, and I agree with it. This is how we go about it in the editorial boards I'm on. We always try to work things out together; simply voting down a minority is not on. And that's exactly what's wrong with the referendum: that minorities are simply left empty-handed, to use Harry's words. The only thing that I do like about it is that a referendum places choices where they belong: with the people.'

'Actually, things should be arranged in such a way that the referendum is the grand finale of a thoroughgoing debate that has generated wide public support for a particular choice. This way, the referendum serves as the formal validation of a social process of consensus-building, and, at the same time, as a pressing incentive to look for such public support.'

This was the first thing Diana had said that afternoon. With five pairs of startled eyes converging on her, Diana proceeded with composure: 'I doubt, for that matter, whether you can always find such public support. On those editorial boards of yours, Selma, you'll manage to agree among yourselves, but as issues involve more and more different interests and values and get more complicated, you'll inevitably get into a tangle. To which you would say, Victoria, that is why you need rulers to call the shots on behalf of others. For you, Selma, this is a far too limited idea of democracy. It seems to me that your two views of democracy – the Victoria view and the Selma view – are poles apart. They're extremes, in a way.'

'And what way would that be?' asked Roderick, who was the first to recover from Diana's sudden torrent of words. 'I think Jonathan's ideas on teledemocracy are also pretty extreme.'

'I can see how you would think that,' Diana continued. 'Your consensus democracy and Jonathan's teledemocracy are also flatly opposed, in a way. Let me explain what I mean. Earlier on Harry said that political science distinguishes between majoritarian democracies and consensus democracies. Here's how it stuck in my mind. In a consensus democracy, people try to find the widest possible public support for policies; they do so by engaging in all-round talks and looking for compromises that might bridge disparate positions; minorities are included as much as possible and excluded as little as possible. In a majoritarian democracy, to quote Abba, "the winner takes it all, the loser standing small"; the majority rules; a majority of 50+1 is enough to take a democratic decision; no endless talk

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required; just count noses and see where the majority is. Is that about right, Harry?’

‘Yeah, that’s about it, Diana. You might add that consensus democracy tends to be “integrative” and that majoritarian democracy tends to be “aggregative”: either you integrate interests by having the parties concerned collaborate, which is what Roderick wants, or you aggregate interests by having elections in which everyone can have their say, which is what Victoria prefers.’

‘Well, thanks Harry, these are very useful concepts. It’s nice to have someone here who knows his classics. But I’m not done yet, for there’s another line I clearly saw appearing today: the dividing line between direct democracy and indirect democracy. Do we entrust our decisions to caretakers or do we want those involved to take the decisions themselves? Victoria and Roderick put a lot of trust in elected representatives. Jonathan and Selma want power to the people. In very different ways, though. Which is where we get back to the former distinction. Jonathan wants to use modern technology to be able to count noses quickly, and Selma wants power-free debate to search for consensus. If I can borrow your writing pad for a sec, Roderick, I’ll draw you a diagram.’

	<i>Aggregative</i>	<i>Integrative</i>
<i>Indirect</i>	Victoria	Roderick
<i>Direct</i>	Jonathan	Selma

‘Victoria combines a preference for indirect democracy with a preference for aggregative democracy,’ Diana continued, poring over Roderick’s pad. ‘And you, Roderick, you prefer indirect democracy combined with integrative democracy. So I’m not surprised that you should think Jonathan’s ideas about teledemocracy pretty extreme. His ideas deviate from yours on both dimensions. Selma’s and Victoria’s ideas are also at opposite ends on both dimensions. Harry tends towards Victoria’s position, albeit with a lot more scepticism. His tendency towards governor’s government based on periodic general elections, though, seems to be more negatively than positively motivated. So I’m having some difficulty tying him to a democratic ideal, for that’s what we’re discussing here. I’m also having a hard time positioning myself in this schedule. My heart’s inclined towards Selma’s combination of direct and integrative democracy as I think that’s the most intense kind of democracy, but my mind doubts its large-scale applicability.’

‘Fancy schedule, Diana, but what’s the point if you can’t position yourself in it?’ Roderick wondered.

‘Well, the schedule helps me to understand and position others who hold more marked views on a particular kind of democracy’, Diana said. ‘And it also

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helps me to get my own bearings, even if my position is more changeable than that of others. This system of coordinates at least allows me to localize my hotchpotch of thoughts. If it's about my ideals, I tend towards Selma's position. If it's about isolated local projects, I tend to move up to Jonathan's position. But if it's about complex national policy issues, I'd rather go with Roderick. And in international relations I have more faith in rulers who work on the basis of a clear voter mandate gained once every so many years.'

'I think it's a useful coordinate system,' said Harry. 'It's not like one of these conceptual prison complexes with impenetrable walls everywhere. It's more like a playing field with chalked lines. Some, like Victoria, take a particular position in the field with their heart and soul. Others, like Diana, move all over the place. Yet others, like myself, are most comfortable on the sideline in a particular corner of the field. I think these four coordinates are very serviceable for grasping all those possible positions and movements. The only problem, though, is what we're going to call them. I don't think somehow that the model of democracy in the bottom left-hand corner should be called "Jonathan democracy", ha ha.'

'Very funny, professor Harry, how about Harryside for the caustic press on the sidelines?'

'Give it a break, boys, let's keep our noses to the grindstone for a bit.' Victoria seized the opportunity to play her part as hostess in charge. 'Who's got any ideas about this? I heard that, in political science, Roderick's position and my position are staked out as "consensus democracy" and "pendulum democracy". Harry mentioned a few other concepts, but "pendulum democracy" is OK by me. Swings of the pendulum: that's what the ballot box can bring about. What Selma wants is called "participatory democracy", I believe.'

'You're pulling a wry face, but I think the only genuine democracy is one in which all people at the very base of society participate fully. Not from a distance, but in full dialogue. So I think it's a good term, though "basic democracy" would also be a good one.'

'I'm fine with "consensus democracy" because there's nothing wrong with consensus,' said Roderick. 'So that just leaves us with the question what to call Jonathan's position in the field.'

'I quite like "teledemocracy", direct democracy based on modern telecommunication technology,' said Jonathan.

'Sounds good, but is it distinctive enough? The indirect kinds of democracy Victoria and Roderick are sold on are also kinds of teledemocracy: they're literally "democracy at a distance". What does the academy say?' Diana cast a questioning look in Harry's direction.

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‘I think “plebiscitary democracy” might be an appropriate one here,’ said Harry. ‘The Romans used the term “plebiscitary” to refer to the common people, the plebs, the non-patricians. In a plebiscitary democracy, it’s all about the voice of the people making itself heard directly and without any intervention, in hand-raising meetings, referendums, or plebiscites. The common majority decides without the intervention of people’s representatives.’

‘Hearing him talk like that, I can feel the contempt and also the fear for the common people, the plebeians, with types like Harry. So, in that sense, “plebiscitary democracy” would be a proper kind of sobriquet. But I’m a bit worried that it might keep reminding everyone of brute masses that are easily led up the garden path, and that’s not what I have in mind at all. I’m thinking of highly qualified, quality-conscious citizens, who are quite capable of making up their own minds as voters. Such voting by individual citizens ought to be a decisive factor in public choice on a much larger scale. So I think “voter democracy” would be a good term.’

‘Alright then, Jonathan, so let’s put this down on paper. Allow me, Diana.’ Victoria took the leather writing pad from Diana. ‘I think we have discovered four basic types of democracy today’:

	<i>Aggregative</i> (majoritarian)	<i>Integrative</i> (non-majoritarian)
<i>Indirect</i> (representative)	Pendulum democracy	Consensus democracy
<i>Direct</i> (self-determining)	Voter democracy	Participatory democracy

‘That’s just typical, isn’t it: rapidly appropriating someone else’s ideas. It used to be mainly men who did that, but these days it’s women pushing and shoving other women aside.’ Selma looked at Diana with a questioning look that called for assent.

‘I’m not appropriating anything, am I? I’m just summarizing what all of us have discovered today, aided by Diana’s bright idea. Surely there’s nothing wrong with that, is there?’ Victoria responded, stung.

‘There’s nothing wrong with that,’ said Roderick soothingly. ‘There’s no need for all of us to be the same. Each to their own. You have your part to play, Selma, and Victoria has hers. Fine with me, if only we achieve something. And we have achieved something today. I had some reservations at first, but what we’ve put down on paper is really a nice summary of the main positions in the debate. Have we actually discovered anything new, Harry?’

Harry pondered this for a bit. ‘You know: if new, not true; if true, not new, as the public administration expert Wildavsky once said. All the concepts in this schedule have been around for some time and have been used many a

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time. The distinction between direct versus indirect democracy is a basic distinction I have often come across in the literature, just like the distinction between aggregative versus integrative democracy. But I haven't yet seen the combination of both dimensions in a singly typology.'

'Well, professor,' said Jonathan, 'so it's about time that you or one of your confederates wrote a fine book about it.'

'That seems like a good point to end our discussion,' said Victoria, sounding like a seasoned politician. 'I thoroughly enjoyed meeting all of you after all those years. We should do this more often. But now it's time for drinks. Or would anyone like some more chocolate cake ...?'