**Democracy, Values and Education**

**Jānis T. Ozoliņš**

**Australian Catholic University**

*Introduction*

There is a voluminous literature that discusses democracy and there is a variety of perspectives that purport to describe its nature. It is not proposed to engage in an extensive analysis of democracy and what constitutes a democratic society, nor develop an account. Nevertheless, it will be argued that if we wish to live in a democratic society, firstly we need to have some understanding of what this means and secondly, have some commitment to the achievement of a democratic society. We will begin by considering some of the critical features of democracy and argue that it is crucial for human freedom and flourishing. The modern state, it will be contended, influenced by libertarianism, is if not non-democratic, a weakened form of democracy, tending towards as oligarchy. It is acknowledged that there are divergent positions, but dialogue needs a starting point and our discussion will begin with Taylor’s comments on democracy which suggest that it will take on a different colour in different cultures. This will lead us into a consideration of the kinds of values and commitments that are necessary if we are to succeed in fostering a democratic society and the role hegemony in maintaining a particular view of the state. Our discussion of Bourdieu reflects on the centrality of culture, including its values and tradition, on our understanding of the nature of society and how education is used to transmit an unconscious commitment to a particular world view. Education, it will be argued, is crucial in the task of forming young people who are committed to democracy and the common good. This involves making them conscious of the processes which lead them to unwittingly absorb values and beliefs that support a self-absorbed and uncritical attitude to the world around them. If we are serious about the importance of democracy for a just and free society, the kind of education that young people receive should not just be concerned about providing skills for employment, but with educating them to be responsible citizens. We will also draw on the work of Ivan Snook in considering the kinds of values and commitments that are needed for human flourishing and the practical impact on educational policy that these have.

That there are connections between democracy and education appears to have been forgotten in the conception of education dominating government policy and discussion of education. Not much thought is given to the aims of education. In particular, the idea that education is about the formation of persons seems to have disappeared, though there are vestigial traces to be found in various mission statements. Given over to an orthodoxy that claims that there is no common good, that the only real value is autonomy, that certain kinds of pluralism are to be respected, and a splintered view of person, there can be nothing that binds us together. That there could conceivably be a limit to the rights that can be claimed does not exist in the zeitgeist in which modern education finds itself. The splintered view of person asserts that there is no essence, that the individual human person is dissolved into a Humean bundle of perceptions and that there is no self to be discovered. If this is taken seriously, then Socrates’ injunction to “know thyself” becomes nonsense, since there is no self to be known. If this so, education needs to concern itself only with skills that are immediately useful and further learning is about anticipating future skills needed in an evanescent work environment. Coupled with the denial of any Absolute, there can be no standard that exists beyond what is constructed by each individual and relativism rules. If there are any values which are held to be binding, these are conventional and instead of being justified by reason are enforced through the use of power and the law. As Margaret Thatcher proposed, there is no society, only individual men and women. (1987) There is something deeply contradictory about asserting individual rights in the name of democracy and then using power to coerce compliance to a particular economic rationalist conception of education.

*Democracy*

Charles Taylor argues that democracy has become the only option because all others have lost their legitimacy. (Taylor, 2007, 117) The Divine Right of kings, for example, is no longer a viable doctrine, and arguably, no one supports tyranny or oligarchy as viable bases for the structure of the state. This does not mean that democracies are not fragile and do not need nurturing to ensure their survival, as they can be overthrown by ambitious generals or suborned from within through the corruption of elected representatives. This is possible not just in exotic countries in faraway places that are backward and underdeveloped, where the rule of law is fragile, but also in our own countries. Giroux (2014), for example, argues that the United States is a democracy on life support and this, we suggest, is due to the increasingly symbiotic relationship between large corporations and government. Over time, however, this collusion has led to an asymmetric relationship in which corporations have greater power and influence than the elected representatives of the people in the decision-making of government. (Beetham, 2011) It is self–evident that those with significant resources, such as multimillionaires and billionaires, will be able to influence governments and policy making to a far greater degree than the average voter. They are able to hire lobbyists to advocate on their behalf, as well as to donate substantial sums towards the campaigns of favoured candidates, so this gives them significant power in the making of government policy.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Taylor proposes two reasons why democracy can take on a different hue or not develop at all in different cultures and traditions. Firstly, the protagonists have to have a sense of themselves as acting in concert as a collectivity or a people, and secondly, they need to have some conception of how to bring a democratic order about. (Taylor, 2007, 122) This means that different societies and communities will have very different conceptions of democracy, and the idea that there is an ideal form of democracy, represented, by say, the United States, is to be resisted. The United Kingdom, for example, is a constitutional monarchy, but this does not mean it is not also a democracy. Taylor says that the American conception of democracy is of a framework in which individuals can act without unnecessary restrictions and without undue influence of some over others, as well as being able to have their voices heard. This can be contrasted with a French view that what is central is the general will of the people determining action, a view that can be traced back to Rousseau. In this latter view there are three conditions, (i) a general will; (ii) an understanding of the common good to which all ought to agree and (iii) it is a rational common policy. The English conception of democracy is different again, where there is a sense that it involves a collective provision of freedom and the common good. Trade unions, which began as friendly societies, have been significant in establishing the will of the common people and its realisation in British democracy. (Taylor, 2007, 125-126)

The sense of powerlessness felt by many in modern democracy, according to Taylor, is due to the loss of private associations in which individuals can express their views and through the collective, make their views known to those in power. In short, there is a weakening of civil society. In Taylor’s analysis, different societies have different conceptions of democracy based on shared experiences, cultures and histories that allow them to imagine what it is to rule as the people. The problem then is that if there is a loss of a sense of acting as a collectivity or a people, the idea that the people rule also becomes lost or, we would suggest, transmuted into a distorted conception of democracy.

We argue for the importance of a civil society in which democratic ideals are practised. If democracy is to thrive in the State, it has to flourish in public institutions and private associations. What can be imagined has to be in the experience already, since the mind can only fashion new ideas and understanding from the contents that it already contains. It has to be possible for democracy to be conceived, but this will not be possible if there are no experiences of participating freely in collective decision-making. Tyrants are not overthrown just because people tire of oppression, but because they come to conceive of a different kind of world. The challenge where this occurs is not just to overthrow one dictator and replace him with another, but to bring about a new vision of how the state is to be organised and how people are to govern themselves. The desire for freedom does not necessarily bring with it a conception of democracy.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Old habits die hard and as Gramsci understood, the way in which we are to change society will be to change the mindsets of the people. In his terms, the working classes have to throw off the hegemonic grip that the value system of the ruling classes have over them. Society needs to be changed in quite radical ways if democracy is to take root. The first element in this is a realisation that the working classes need to rid themselves of the worldview of the ruling classes and substitute their own.

Gramsci’s most important contribution to the theory of democracy is his concept of hegemony. It enables him to argue that politics can be understood as a privileged sphere of intersubjective consensual interaction between different groups. One of the main features of Gramsci’s conception of hegemony is that there is always a priority of the general will over the individual will, which is to say of common or public interest over individual or private interest. The preponderance of the general will over the individual will is one of the hallmarks of democracy and republicanism. (Coutinho, C.N., 2012, 127) The concept of *volonté générale* – general will – is also found in Rousseau and is essential to the theory of democracy, but does not appear in the liberal tradition. Hegel, who acknowledges his debt to Rousseau in developing his account of the relation between human freedom and the state, also makes use of the concept of the general will. Hegel, however, does not think of the general will as the sum of individual wills, but as an objective, rational will which is expressed in the state. (Hegel, 1991, #258) In Hegel, the state is the vehicle through which human freedom is realised and is the totality of ethical life, as such, it enables human flourishing. Hayek disagrees with the Rousseauian notion of the general will, arguing that in modern democracy, the common will is rarely what is expressed in the activities of government. He observes that in most in democratic countries a majority of a representative body makes the laws and directs the government. In many cases, what is legislated will not reflect a common will. (Hayek, 1973, 1) There is no doubt that in the detailed workings of government, where there is a need to balance a variety of competing interests that the final decision on a particular issue may not please anyone, so in that sense, the result does not represent a notional common will. Nor, is it necessary that common will needs to mean unanimity in decision-making. In the broad sense that we can take Gramsci to be using this, it means acceptance of a particular socio-political arrangement which represents a more equitable system of enabling as many individuals as possible to flourish and be fulfilled. As Aristotle has intimated, it may not be best system, but it is better than any of the alternatives. (*The Politics*, 1289a-1289b5)

The conception of hegemony for Gramsci is an ethico-political one, in which the general will increasingly becomes the common will, taking over from the economic-corporatist will. This involves, according to Gramsci, a kind of recognition of the general good for human beings in which class divisions have disappeared. What appears is a consensual or ethical state, where there is little or no coercion, but everyone has a kind of contractual agreement with each other about the conduct of life in the state. Contractual in the sense that everyone agrees that the needs of the community take precedence over the needs of the private individual. We can, of course, argue whether this should hold in all cases.

Hegemony can be seen as one social class exercising influence over another –such as the bourgeoisie exercising control over the working class or in more modern idiom, business interests exercising control over working families. Complex forces of hegemony, since they saturate the whole consciousness of the ordinary human being, operate to control and sustain a particular view of the world such that a particular cultural and socio-economic political system is maintained. (Entwistle, 1979, 7-8) In contemporary society mass media exercises a significant influence over the populace because they control what information people receive. Hegemony can be exercised in different ways. To establish a new hegemony requires a fundamental change in the way people think. For Gramsci, hegemony was rule by consent and education is central to the development of this. Schools are therefore an important site for the development of transformative ideas and for changing attitudes and beliefs. If schools can be regarded as organised to support the existing neo-liberal and corporate agenda, so that they form compliant and competent workers who will not question market capitalism nor think too much, then there is an urgent task for educational institutions to repudiate the essentially anti-democratic neoliberal hegemonic forms of education which seek to entrench the ascendancy of the existing order. This assumes that there is a desire to live in a democracy.

*Bourdieu and Inculcation of Culture*

Bourdieu argues that schools have a significant influence in the transmission of existing hegemony. This is because he holds that the school is obliged to perpetuate and transmit the capital of consecrated cultural signs, that is, culture handed down to it by its intellectual creators of the past, and that culture itself is merely a mechanism for the reproduction of social classes, moreover, all pedagogic action is objectively symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary power. (Bourdieu, 1971, 178) In Bourdieu’s view, the school exists to perpetuate a particular conception of the world through the separation of what is high culture or consecrated culture from vulgar or heretical culture. In other words, the school acts as an agent of the existing hegemonic social and political powers. Higher education institutions are similarly involved in the perpetuation of existing structures. Bourdieu says, the following in relation to the Academy: “…the university claims the monopoly of transmission of the consecrated works of the past, which it sanctifies as 'classics' as well as the monopoly of legitimation and consecration (by granting degrees amongst other things) of those cultural consumers who most closely conform.” (Bourdieu, 1971, 179) It is clear that whoever controls educational institutions controls the formation of those who attend them to learn. An example of the way in which educational institutions shape the outlooks, perspectives and forms the thought processes of their students is provided by Lévi-Strauss, who, reflecting on his own studies at the Sorbonne, observed that philosophy teaching in French universities followed a particular pattern. French students of philosophy learned to adhere to a single method. The method involves considering two sides to a question, dismissing both and coming up with a third. Crucially, having learned to apply this method to philosophical questions, the skill acquired could be used to handle any problem. (Lévi-Strauss, C., 1961, 54-5.) Lévi-Strauss reflects that what students learned was a certain kind of skill, but know-how had replaced the pursuit of truth. (1961, 55)

Bourdieu argues that the school or educational institution shapes the thought of the individuals that are educated in them so that the thought patterns and the very structure of their thinking unconsciously reflects a particular view of the world. It becomes a part of themselves – consubstantial with who they are – and hence, they are immersed in a particular way of thought and meaning which is reinforced by those around them, who have had a similar schooling. (1971, 190) Bourdieu says, “…it is clear that the school, which is responsible for handing on that culture, is the fundamental factor in the cultural consensus in as far as it represents the sharing of a common sense which is the prerequisite for communication.” (1971, 190-191) This is not an original idea, since it is precisely this idea which Augustine discusses when he argues that when we come to know something it becomes part of us, what is known is joined to us in such a way that we have a new creation. (Augustine, *The Teacher*, esp. 12.40-13.46.) Augustine argues that what we learn is not just a matter of knowing words or learning a formula. We have to understand. Knowledge makes us other than what we were before and since we are immersed in our culture, it becomes part of our understanding of the world in such a manner that it is unconscious. Our mode of thinking reflects our background values and beliefs. Importantly, these are rarely, if ever, questioned, because they form the ground on which we stand and the vantage point from which we survey the world.

If we are serious about the preserving a democratic state and developing responsible citizens with a love of truth and a commitment to justice and the common good, then this will only occur if this is the overt aim of the education which we offer to young people. This is no simple task, since the backgrounds of different individuals will be diverse. Though Australian society professes egalitarianism, it is self-evident that it is not. As Gramsci observes in relation to European society, and indeed, is evident from a survey of the mix of socio-economic origins of students in higher education institutions in Australia, that those attending higher education predominantly come from the middle and upper classes. The proportion of those from lower socio-economic classes has not changed despite fifty years of mass higher education. The conclusion from this is that higher education acts to reinforce a particular class structure and a dominant culture.[[3]](#endnote-3) If political and structures are to be democratic, then they need to be inclusive, since it is the role of the state to enable all its citizens to flourish.

The dominant culture is one which reinforces a particular perspective of the world and the political order reflects this. Public policy in which the virtues of individualism, hard work, competitiveness, efficiency, outcomes and the market are emphasised leads to the canonisation of individual success as if it is the result of individual achievement alone, divorced from any dependence on social networks, socio-economic status, supportive family and friends or good teaching. The educational system is not egalitarian, and should be recognised as such. If the educational system is geared simply to produce workers of different types, then it is reinforcing class divides and hence is scarcely democratic, if an essential feature of democracy is the equality of all citizens as far as opportunities to be fully flourishing, fulfilled, engaged and responsible members of the political community is concerned. The educational system may well serve market capitalism, but this is not democracy.

The centrality of education for the transmission of culture, attitudes and values, even as governments and business seek to focus public discourse on education to be about employability and skills. It is not that there is not a place for demanding that those exiting the education system have good skills and are employable, but it is that this also results in the inculcation of an unconscious acceptance of the culture, values and beliefs of the dominant economic rationalist conception of the society. Bourdieu says, “As a habit-forming force, the school provides those who have been subjected directly or indirectly to its influence not so much with particular and particularized patterns of thought as with that general disposition, generating particular patterns that can be applied in different areas of thought and action, which may be termed cultured *habitus*.” (1971, 194) He adds, quoting Kurt Lewin, that an individual’s conception of reality will be determined by the social milieu and time in which he or she finds himself or herself. (1971, 195) Furthermore, elites are bound not because they are in contact with one another, rather they are a bound together because they have had a common schooling which means that they have a common outlook and experience of education. Intimacy and fellow-feeling, Bourdieu says, are based on a common culture and is rooted in the unconscious. (1971, 198)

An individual’s contact with his culture depends basically on the circumstances under which he has acquired it, because the act whereby culture is communicated is an example of a certain kind of relation to the culture. Thus, a lecture conveys a certain kind of content, but much more than this, it also conveys a certain kind of intellectual prowess and a way of doing things. (1971, 199) Bourdieu does not provide more explication than this, but it would appear that the formal lecture is more than just the transmission of content, but also a certain kind of understanding of culture, or hierarchy within society and that some have knowledge and others don’t. There is also a conveying of certain kinds of relations between those who know and those who do not. This is not just an ordering of the relation between pupil and teacher, but also conveys the idea that there is a proper order in society. From one perspective, it suggests that the same type of order exists in the wider society, that society is divided into those who know, those who have certain skills, wealth, who belong to a particular class in society. Though all of this is by no means conveyed just by the formal lecture, some elements are. On the positive side, it also conveys the idea that there are things to be learned and that some individuals are in a position to assist that learning. Pupils recognise that they need to strive to learn. The question we might raise is about what modern conceptions of teaching and learning convey. The idea of the teacher as facilitator, supposes that the teacher is not an authority, but merely a means of aiding the pupil in his or her quest for knowledge. Similarly, where a subject is fully online, with recorded lecture material, the role of the teacher becomes largely administrative, at best, a monitor and occasional discussion partner in online fora. It should not be supposed that underlying these is an egalitarian model of the relation between teacher and learner, and hence, a more democratic relationship, that inculcates a commitment to democracy. It may, on the contrary, reinforce the existing economic rationalist and libertarian view that there is no authority the individual needs to respect, since the only authority is the individual. All that matters in the education process is that the individual receives the skills that they have paid for and anything else is superfluous. Arguably, the formal lecture conveys the idea of formal hierarchy, that there are those who know more than others, have more skill and experience, which is to be transmitted to those willing to learn. It demands an attitude of humility, an acknowledgement that the individual is not self-sufficient, but dependent on those who have gone before and that there is something to be learned from others. In understanding this, there is a sense that there is a proper of order of things.

*Snook, Hayek and Democracy*

Snook (1995, 55) in commenting on the ten years of Labour governments in New Zealand during the eighties and early nineties, states that it is absurd to think that interest groups should not be able to influence government policy in a democracy. In his view, the point of democracy is that policy can be influenced by different groups. The problem, however, is that government can be partial to influence by particular groups to the exclusion of others. In the case of education reform, it might be reasonable to suppose that the voices of educators should be heard. This appears to have been far from the case. Of course, Snook was writing twenty years ago, but it is reasonable to consider whether much has changed. Our interest is not so much in old battles fought twenty years ago, rather in what the outcomes of those battles might mean for our understanding of the relationship between education proposed by various interest groups and the formation of democratic citizens. In particular, as we shall see from Snook’s account, there is little which could be considered as an education supportive of a democratic society, understood in the terms we have suggested. The conclusion to be drawn is that the various interest groups, generally made up of major corporations and big business are not interested in fostering a democratic society, but rather an oligarchy in which their interests shape the purposes of education. Libertarianism does not support democracy.

This is what Snook points out in his discussion of libertarianism, noting that Nozick in *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, fails to mention it at all in the index. (Nozick, 1974) Snook notes the major reservations about democracy held by Burke: (i) The notion of the general will of the people as determining right and wrong could lead to disaster, since it was fallible and could not be the standard. (ii) He was concerned about the tyranny of the majority. (iii) He had doubts about the political ability of the ordinary person. They may not be able to make good decisions. (iv) Those without property where less reliable than those with it. (1995, 58) We shall not respond to Burke in detail, but it should be noted that the notion of the general will, particularly as developed by Hegel, does not simply mean a majority, but is a universal will expressed through the ethical state and is concerned with the common good. Freedom for the individual consists in aligning his or her will with the universal will.[[4]](#endnote-4) Since the universal will is not the majority will, the tyranny of the majority can be avoided. With an education which aims to produce responsible, committed democratic citizens, the latter two reservations are avoidable, the idea that those who are not ordinary and propertied are more reliable notwithstanding.

Snook says that according to Hayek, modern democracies have debased the ideal of democracy by taking on absolute power. (1995, 59) For Hayek, democracy refers solely to a method of government which is legitimated by its commitment to certain kinds of principles that have majority support. These principles evolve and should not be done away with. (Hayek, 1973, 98) According to Hayek, rules are devised for the conduct of society, by a small group, since it this group which practises these rules and these are consequently adopted by the majority. What rules are selected is not a matter of reason, but a matter of success. What is accepted is not a rational process. Snook says that Hayek’s position is profoundly undemocratic. For Hayek, democracy is the evolved system of government which protects the market and the general values which accompany it. The general person in the street is not allowed to have a say in the details of the general values and principles already agreed to. This is probably not entirely fair to Hayek, since he notes that parliaments should be subject to laws and hence, cannot simply legislate whatever laws take their fancy – they have to be subject to a constitution. Aristotle’s view here is that the constitution is what guides law-making and it is not the *demos*. (*The Politics*, 1292a5) There have to be limits placed on the power of government. (Hayek, 1973, 3)

Hayek observes that wherever democratic institutions cease to be constrained by the rule of law, they lead to not only ‘totalitarian democracy’, but in due time to a plebiscitary dictatorship. Hayek notes that belief in democracy presupposes belief in something higher than democracy. (1973, 3) He does not indicate what he means by this, but it would not be difficult to conclude that he is referring to some kind of absolute notion of the right and the good which can act as the source and ground of not only moral law, but also human law. Hayek does not think that what the majority decide should be binding on everyone, since there is no justification for extending the power to coerce beyond what is necessary for the maintenance of order. (1973, 6) The question is the extent to which the power to coerce is justified. There are two issues: (i) Whether there are some things which the moral law would prohibit from being legislated – for example, euthanasia and abortion. There is obviously not consensus on these issues, but there is a need to appeal to a higher law in order to justify the making of human law. Laws cannot be enacted arbitrarily, but must be justified as necessary for the well-being of the people. Laws will not bind if there are not justifiable reasons given for the laws enacted. In a modern democracy, this could also mean that these laws could be changed if the reasons justifying them are rejected.[[5]](#endnote-5) (ii) The second issue concerns the limitations that should be placed on the power to coerce. As far as possible, power should not be used to coerce. Every effort should be made to reach consensus. Where this is not possible, there should be effort made to reach a position that respects minority positions. There are limits to this – one need not, for example, respect the positions of those who advocate the destruction of the community. Hayek says, “the belief that all on which a majority can agree is by definition just has for several generations been impressed upon popular opinion.” (1973, 7) He adds that a common belief is that what the majority holds as just is not arbitrary, but this is false. What is just is not simply a matter of a majority opinion being arrived at by some form of democratic procedure, but what is arrived at accordance to a universal rule that is applied in a particular situation and agreed to by a majority. This is not an arbitrary decision. (1973, 8) There is the further question of how these universal rules were arrived at and what guarantees that these are not arbitrary.

Hayek has a fairly jaundiced view of the way in which modern representative government works, arguing that it is basically subject to the whims of various interest groups and lobbies that seek advantage for themselves through the public purse. Since it is not required that politicians pay for anything out their own pockets, it is not surprising that they bestow favours on those who will support them in their own causes. (1973, 9-10). Only limited government can be decent government, because there cannot exist general moral rules for the assignment of welfare benefits. Kant remarks that this is because welfare depends on the material content of the will and hence is incapable of a general principle. (1973, 11) We note, however, that there is a distinction to be drawn between the concept of democracy and that of democratic government. Hayek’s criticisms of democratic government, or perhaps more precisely, western forms of government, does not seem to be about democracy, though ostensibly the democratic state exists in order for democracy to flourish, so the two are connected, but are not the same. This is also Snook’s complaint about Hayek. (Snook, 1995, 59) Hayek in fact concedes this saying that democracy refers solely to a method of government. (1973, 98)

The term democracy, according to Hayek, is generally used to mean egalitarianism, but also the process of vote-buying, and this is not democracy. What he means by this is that in a modern state democratic rule involves various special interest groups having to be placated and remunerated in order to guarantee support for the existing government. It would be better, in his opinion, that the task of enacting laws and determining what is best for the common good was to be left to a randomly selected group of mature adults to work at over a period of twenty years. The current system of democracy leads to the power of legislation being left to a particular party that is obligated to its supporters to enact what is in their interests. This is somewhat removed from the idea that government, especially democratic government, enacts legislation for the benefit of all citizens, not sectional interests. Hayek observes that human beings submit to authority, as expressed in a state because they trust it to act in accordance with normative conceptions of what is just. (1973, 32-33) This suggests that democracy requires governments to be concerned with the common good and just rule, rather than pandering to sectional interests.

Although Snook’s criticisms of Hayek as being to a large extent anti-democratic are correct, some of Hayek’s observations of the workings of the modern state are quite acute, even if we disagree with the conclusions he reaches. Hayek believes that the market economy was stumbled upon by accident and was not the product of human intellect, he says we are not intelligent enough to have designed it. (1973, 164) In general, Hayek appears to adhere to a kind of social evolution in which various cultures and traditions have evolved, and this is not a product of any directedness towards an end, but simply is the result of the interaction of human beings on a large scale. He denies that there are any moral values that have their source in the Divine, rather they too are the product of social and cultural evolution, but are not the product of sociobiology. (1973, 164) For Hayek, the kind of society we have evolves, but the market appears to be immune to this. There is a form of cultural selection. Hayek says that the rules governing society and culture evolve, but do not allow for complete change. (1973, 167) The problem with this view of Hayek’s is that it assumes that the modern state is somehow the product of the forces of social evolution and so not able to be influenced by human beings. Market capitalism emerges because it is more successful than other rival economic systems. Similarly, if democracy is to survive, presumably it would be because it is more successful in surviving than other forms of political society.

Nozick’s libertarian approach to the State, which shares some features with Hayek’s conception of the state, has significance for democracy in in several ways, even though he does not mention democracy at all in *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. He says that the rejection of welfare rights and the focus on property rights results in the loss of equality, as required by democracy. This is because only those with property rights have rights since the role of government policy is to ensure that property is safeguarded and goods are fairly distributed. This will be done amongst those who possess wealth. The notion of the minimal state makes democracy irrelevant since government is restricted to only the defence of people and property. Voting in elections is unnecessary, since it would only be needed where a government exceeded its mandate. Moreover, the kind of justice proposed by Nozick is also destructive of democracy, since only what protects and upholds property rights is just. Any other proposals, for universal medical and health care, for instance, would be unjust. (Nozick, 1974) Significantly, Snook contends that in order for the libertarian agenda to be realised, the only safe, peaceful way of bringing about a libertarian society is through education. He also believes that democracy will not do well under libertarianism because there is little point to it, as it is up to particular communities to choose how they will arrange their affairs and democracy is one among many choices. (1995, 62-63) We can add that it is also true that a democratic society will only be peacefully brought about through education.

In order for society to avoid the tyranny of the majority, Snook says that it needs to subscribe to human rights. Human rights ensure that there are certain losses that human beings should not suffer, for example, loss of freedom of speech. The possession of human rights involves both positive rights and negative rights, thus, a positive right would allow persons to pursue their good, such as happiness, while negative rights would prevent others from making extravagant claims of them, such as rights to health, welfare and education. Libertarians need a theory of human rights in order to justify their views on freedom, property and the role of the state, but have to reject the ramifications of a broad theory of human rights. (1995, 64) Snook says the libertarian is basically hostile to democracy, since they accept Hayek’s view that those who have sufficient time have the responsibility to be part of the legislature. (Hayek, 1973, 115-116) While some who are not propertied might be able to find a place in government, the core of those governing would be an elite of successful, wealthy individuals. (1995, 65) In short, it can be concluded that what we have is an oligarchy and not a democracy.

Importantly, Snook provides some suggestions for the securing of democracy. A key prerequisite, however, is somehow making it possible that all groups making up society have an interest in the preservation of democracy. How this is to be done is not so straightforward, and we cannot assume that there will be interest in preserving democracy, rather than advocating for one’s own interest group. Even if we assume that in general people support the idea of democracy, the question in most cases will be what kind of democracy are they in fact supporting.

Snook advocates the following: (i) in the making of policy, concentrate on the overall strategy, rather than on particular interests, otherwise different interest groups will be divided; (ii) preserve the ideal of democratic participation in education. This is perhaps obvious, since where there is no experience of democracy within civil society, there is unlikely to be such in the state. (iii) there should be regional structures which address local needs. (iv) Importantly, we must oppose educational initiatives which erode democracy. For example, the de-professionalisation of teaching, unfair comparisons between schools ( such as league tables). Ironically, he says that schools are not like supermarkets and restaurants, since they are bearers of democratic ideals to the next generation. He agrees that a major purpose of education is to foster democratic citizens, who are able to govern their own lives and share in the governing of their own society. (v) Schools prepare students for full participation in democracy and what this means is a matter of continuing debate, noting that there is a conflict between advocating individual freedom and civic virtue. (1995, 66)

In order to attempt to resolve this tension, three conditions are necessary, says Snook:

(i) Education must be non-repressive, by which he means that schools should not place limits on the use of rational discourse to select different conceptions of the good. He observes that in the past, religions have sought to make such a restriction, but now it seems to come from economic rationalism, which seeks to remake education as being about skills, competition, the market and what is measureable. (1995, 67) While Snook is right to recommend that education allow for open discussion of the nature of the good, this does not mean that there may not be an answer to this question. That is, to assume a pluralism of goods seems to take us to the anti-perfectionism of the libertarian and hence, to a rejection of democracy. It seems to me that there are some restrictions which we might need to make in order to preserve democracy. (ii) Education needs to be non-discriminatory, which means that it should be accessible to all students. Education is acknowledged as a right, so it should be available to everyone, but here Snook means that it is one thing to have some education available, but he proposes that it has to be adequate to the task of preparing citizens for their role in a democratic society. Democracy demands that all young people have the opportunity to be fulfilled. (iii) Schools in a democracy must provide practices of the democratic deliberation and decision-making. We have also argued for this particular condition, since without experience of the practice of democracy, it is hardly likely that students will have any conception of what it is and why it is to be valued. Snook reminds us that Dewey warned against the separation of administration of schools from their educational purposes and so democratic participation needs to be embedded in the management practices of the school. This means, according to Snook, we have to ensure that our management structures are not top-down, hierarchical structures in which teachers, parents and students, have little or no genuine say in decision-making. Dewey says that the reality of education is found in the personal and face to face contact of teacher and child. (1995, 67)

*Conclusion*

We have argued that the modern state is a weakened form of democracy, if it is a democracy at all. The influence of powerful vested interests constantly erode the freedoms of the ordinary citizen, who, embedded in a particular cultural tradition which is reinforced by the institutions around him or her, is largely unaware of the values and beliefs that form his or her understanding of the world. As Gramsci explains so well, the world as seen from the perspective of those in power is the unconscious perspective of the ordinary person, the “working families” of popular political parlance in Australia. Once we are aware of this, we are in a position to change the political landscape to a more democratic one. Education, as Snook points out is central to this, but it should also be noted that Education is in the service of those who wish to maintain an oligarchic hegemony. The battle to be fought is for the control of education, so that it is in the service of democracy. This will need to begin in our institutions of higher education with the education of teachers, but these institutions themselves will need to be transformed so that they too are democratic in their structures. While democracy may not be perfect, it is, as has already been stated, the system which is most likely to enable human beings and human society to flourish.

**Bibliography**

Aristotle. 1952. *The Politics*. Tr. Benjamin Jowett. In Robert Maynard Hutchins. (Ed.). *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 9. Aristotle II. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 445-548.

Augustine. 1995. *Against the Academicians.* *The Teacher*. Tr. Peter King. Indianapolis, In.: Hackett Publishing.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2014. *Towards a Performance Measurement Framework for Equity in Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Beetham, David. 2011. “Unelected Oligarchy: Corporate and Financial Dominance in Britain’s Democracy.” Paper for the Democratic Audit in the UK, At URL: <http://filestore.democraticauditarchive.com/file/de232c951e8286baa79af208ac250112-1311676243/oligarchy.pdf> Accessed: 19/10/2015.

Bideleux, Robert and Jeffries, Ian. 2007. *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. 1971. Intellectual Field and Creative Project. In M.F.D. Young. (Ed.). *Knowledge and Control*. London: Collier-MacMillan, 161-188.

Bridges to Higher Education. 2014. At URL: <http://www.bridges.nsw.edu.au/toolkit/why_does_widening_participation_matter> Accessed: 26/10/2015.

Coutinho, Carlos Nelson. 2012. *Gramsci’s Political Thought*. *Historical Materialism Book Series*. Vol. 38. Tr. Pedro Sette-Camara. Foreword. Joseph Buttigieg. Leiden: Brill.

Entwistle, Harold. 1979. *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Gauja, Anika. 2010. *Political Parties and Elections: Legislating for Representative Democracy.* Farnham: Ashgate.

Giroux, Henry A. 2014. The Swindle of Democracy in the Neo-liberal University and the Responsibility of Inellectuals. *Democratic Theory*, 1, 1, 9-37.

Hayek, F. A. 1982. *Law, Legislation and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy*. Vols. 1-3. London: Routledge.

Hayek, F. A. 1973. *Law Legislation and Liberty*. 3: *The Political Order of a Free Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1991. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Ed. Allen W. Wood. Tr. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1961. *A World on the Wane*. Tr. John Russell. London: Hutchinson

Neuhouser, Frederick. 1993. Freedom, Dependence and the General Will. *The Philosophical Review*, 102, 3, 363-395.

Nozick, Robert. 1974. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books.

Snook, Ivan. 1995. Democracy and Education in a Monetarist Society. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 27, 1, 55-68.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. Cultures of Democracy and Citizen Efficacy. *Public Culture*, 19, 1, 117–150.

Thatcher, Margaret. 1987. Interview for *Women’s Own*. 23rd September 1987. At URL: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> Accessed: 2/11/2015.

The Age. 2015. "Political donations system needs reform." *Age, The (Melbourne)*, July 30, 16. *Australia/New Zealand Reference Centre*, EBSCO*host* (accessed October 19, 2015).

1. **ENDNOTES**

   There has been some concern about the lack of transparency about donations to political parties for some time, but little progress in terms of reform has been made to date. See for example, The Age. 2015. "Political donations system needs reform." Australia, for example, has minimal regulation of private donations to political parties. See also Gauja, A. 2010, 165ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The experiences of many of the former Soviet bloc countries on gaining independence have been that there remains a totalitarian, bureaucratic consciousness and business is conducted in the way it has been done in the past. The change to a democratic mindset takes significant time because the existing institutional structures, such as industry, judiciary and administrative, remain within the power structures of the former regime. For some further discussion of this, see Bideleux, R. and Jeffries, I., 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. There have been recent attempts in Australia to address this, since the publication of the Bradley Report and the decision by the Federal Government to remove caps on student enrolments. See, for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014; Bridges to Higher Education, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Space precludes an account of the universal will, as developed by Rousseau and more particularly by Hegel as providing a way of reconciling individual freedom with constraints as a result of living in a community where there are other individual wills. Genuine freedom lies in conforming one’s will with the common good, since it is this which enables all human beings to flourish and to be fulfilled. Ultimately, it leads to happiness and this is what all human beings seek. For Hegel, the state exists as that in which the ethical life is actualised. He says, “The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea – the ethical spirit as the substantial will, manifest and clear to itself, which thinks and knows itself and implements what it knows insofar as it knows it.” (Hegel, 1991, #257) Genuine freedom for the individual is constituted in the state, since without the state there cannot be real freedom. The good state exists in order to enable the individual to flourish and hence to realise his or her freedom. The state can be thought of as enabling the kinds of social, political and economic conditions that facilitate human flourishing and hence, brings about human freedom. Secondly, freedom could be said to be secured for individuals by belonging to the kind of state which is the embodiment of freedom. These suggest two kinds of freedoms, the former, moral freedom and the latter, civil freedom. See Neuhouser, F., 1993, for further discussion of this. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Hayek argues that though on the whole he rejects legal positivism, he does not think that law needs to necessarily connect to the moral law. That is, he accepts that there are valid laws which have no relation to the moral law. (1982, 56) We disagree with this position, since all laws presumably are based on justice, which is a moral concept. Arguing this will take us too far from our concerns in this paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)