Part Two

Images of Community: A Brief Preface

A deluge of complaints often dominates present intellectual discussion of community, sometimes interfering with the serious consideration of its theory and practice. Also pervasive is a search through American history for past communities and the tragic missteps which have led the United States away from community. Sometimes this search is a journey toward optimism; other times it is a setting for reflection on community as a challenge. Rarely is it just a nostalgic trip to a lost ideal or the resurrection of the past as a stick for beating the present.

No set of categories can capture the current range of conceptions of community which are part of a large and expanding conversation. The idea of community is now too alluring to be contained any longer within a discrete group of intellectual discussions. Such pluralism is no surprise given the formlessness of contemporary intellectual life. It is both free and uneasy as its political imagination pursues community everywhere and anywhere.

The following chapters will demonstrate this richness and display some of the many portraits of community among contemporary political intellectuals. We can see for ourselves some of the directions taken by community-focused thinkers. These directions are not neatly separable since contemporary intellectual life is too fluid for that, yet they exist nonetheless.

In this journey, I have selected six directions in contemporary thinking about community. Even taken together they do not begin to encompass the multitude of current explorations on the subject. Moreover, each contains generous diversity within its own world. Yet
each is a worthy and significant illustration of contemporary patterns of thought about community as an ideal. The basis for selecting each approach varied, though each one's appeal among a number of political intellectuals was essential. In some instances the quality of the argument was crucial; in others, the extent of intellectual controversy swirling around them; and in yet others, the connection with arguments about our historical experience of community. My goal was to consider a mosaic of images of community in contemporary intellectual thought, one faithful to the pluralism that surrounds the topic today.

First, I chose community as participatory democracy, a vision which preceded the era of the New Left. It had its heyday in the late 1960s and has not died since when so many of its youthful adherents have matured into active intellectuals. This notion of community is public and political, affective and altruistic. It affirms decentralized decision making and a participatory experience that seeks to transform politics from a process to a way of life.

Three other forms of community have attained their fullest modern expression in the post-1960s and represent postmodern renderings of ancient themes. One idea, republicanism, attracts the greatest interest in scholarly and academic circles. Known for its historical roots in classical European experience and late eighteenth-century America, the republican ideal of community focuses on public community. Its advocates insist that true community requires a life of shared virtues and shared history. They give serious consideration to the challenge of reconciling liberalism with community and propose in republicanism a version of community which they judge is not alien to American experience. They see a tradition of republicanism in the history of the United States and are anxious that we acknowledge it also.

Another central arena today for the debate about community is what I call the realm of roots, where community is less public, less formal, and less modern somehow than in many ordinary political models. It is a realm where we find our origin and definition, the roots of our lives, the roots of communities in which we live or from which we may escape in order to live. The two examples I explore are roots in the sense of tradition and in the sense of family. Both areas attract many observers interested in community who are eager both to defend and to attack. The lines of debate are complex and community in any
form is not always the winner, but the discussions are important and interesting.

What I term globalist images of community are now much in vogue. Survivalism is the pessimistic face, globalism the optimistic, of the same disposition: community defined and justified in terms of the globe as a whole, the earth and its life. The last two decades have accelerated openness toward this conception of community.

Far more familiar in terms of Western political thought are religious understandings of community. After all, the world’s great religions have long affirmed community, albeit more sometimes in theory than in practice. And yet a revival of thinking about community in religious language was perhaps unexpected in a supposedly secular age. The growth is strong, however. In many instances it reflects the influence of the 1960s on current political theology. It is also, as we shall see, quite pluralistic in its expressions.

A final perspective is what I might call existential community. Its advocates seek community, but they distinguish themselves by their overwhelming suspicion that it is an ideal beyond actual achievement. For them and them alone in this age of both desperation and optimism, community is an ideal whose social reality (as opposed to private or personal reality) is permanently elusive—and must be understood as such. Perhaps they remind us of themes of the 1950s, and thus that even that decade lives on.

Again, I stress that these directions and the detailed considerations of each are but images of community. Images do not form sharp outlines or have tight boundaries and, indeed, they easily blur into each other. This is, I think, perfectly apt for the fluid world of modern intellectual reflection and argument over community. The lines between participatory democratic models of community and republican ones are not always sharp. Ideas of religious community may seem distinct in the obvious sense but in form are often recognizably participatory, traditionalist, or republican. And this analysis looks at the perspective of the whole image, not at the particular visions of assorted theorists within each image of community. What we face may seem bewildering or overwhelming, but it is not in the least discouraging to my mind. It is, rather, a testament to the richness of intellectual focus on community in contemporary American political thought. The subject is flourishing: developing, wide open, exciting, a major turn.
Chapter Four

Participatory Community

Despite the flourishing interest in community today among American political intellectuals, the appeal of participatory democracy may come as a surprise. Embraced by the New Left in the mid-1960s, this vision of community is easy to dismiss as a relic of more optimistic (or naive) days. From a skeptic's view participatory democracy has had only a modest connection with American history, and an even smaller one with general human experience and deserves scant role in contemporary understandings of democracy or community.

The truth is different, however. Participatory democracy may have won few lasting battles in American life or anywhere else in the 1960s or at any time, but it has won a considerable place in the hopes of some contemporary political intellectuals. The New Left is long over as are many (but by no means all) of the experiments in participatory government it inspired. The idea of participatory democracy, however, lives on. Its proponents have no difficulty in connecting their vision with the dramatic pantheon of predecessors they enshrine from Western history. Originating in classical Athens (albeit excluding slaves and women), the ideal has been reborn in the hands of such theorists as Rousseau, Jefferson, and G. D. H. Cole, among others.¹

In recent decades, make no mistake, the proximate lineage for the participatory democratic community is the New Left, often members of the New Left grown up or grown old. Contrast the intellectual dismissal of participatory democracy, not to mention community, in the United States in the decades after World War II to the famous (if short-lived) fervor for participatory democracy and community in the late 1960s.² No matter how much the realists of the 1970s or 1990s
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dismiss direct democracy, in a few short years during the 1960s it made enough intellectual converts to last for a generation (or more).

There is no single definition of participatory democracy or of the participatory community. Even in its most substantial modern forms it wears several faces; certain themes, however, are frequently invoked. Of course, one is the importance of face-to-face direct self-governance. Another is the ideal of community as a public group, a group of citizens, each respected and heard, united by common purpose, encouraged by shared human sympathies. Equality receives great emphasis, economic as well as political equality. The rationale is equal respect for the needs of all and the necessity of equality for authentic mutual deliberations. And proponents of every version are confident that the result will be growth in individual self-determination and with it self-esteem. The community and the individual will advance together.

The usual defining elements are also expressed in negative terms. In this case they include pointed complaints about selfish individualism in the modern, noncommunitarian world, where "possessive individualism" or "market rationality" rather than participation are ways of life. These are routinely condemned as a travesty of the goal of a communal "politics of altruism and collective interest." Equally condemned in almost every version is the giantism prevalent in modern business and government, along with any other sign of denial of what Sale calls "politics on a human scale."

Integral to participatory democracy, then, is small-group decision making which respects each person, ensures his or her essential equality, and strives to achieve a deep and intensive relationship among its participants—that is community. In such a vision participation is the very model of community and of political education. The way Benjamin Barber describes the project is especially helpful: "At the heart of strong democracy is talk," he says, which gives life to "participatory deliberation and ongoing, public" communication. It is a "process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community."

The Case for Participatory Democracy

According to its eager proponents, the reasons one should reach for a participatory community are numerous and not necessarily
mutually exclusive. A standard reason builds from the claim that direct
democracy is integral to what it means to be a person and to live a
significant, nontrivial life. It is somehow “natural because it is a neces-
sary condition for, indeed is an essential manifestation of, a dignified
human life.”" It “has intrinsic value . . . because it is necessary for
human maturation.”" Or, it is vital for the central ingredient of life,
authentic human freedom."

Another reason supporters advance is their belief that participa-
tory politics is the remedy for the moral and metaphysical drift that
liberalism has bequeathed us. Some argue it will address the moral
vacuum because participatory discussion is likely to develop commu-
nity standards. Others argue that although participatory democracy
needs no foundation of absolute truth, “it may be the political answer
to the question of moral uncertainty.”" Common decisions will be
enough to operate a community well.

Such an analysis annoys some proponents of community because
it is thin in its understanding of the needs of people and of commu-
nity. People are seen as simple, rational discussants whose emotional
depths and crosscurrents somehow disappear, and community can
become little more than a debating society." This is not a general view,
but neither is it entirely mistaken. Perhaps the idea of community has
always been something of a substitute (skeptics might say only a
postponement) for metaphysics."

A less problematic argument, though surely no less controversial,
concentrates on individual development. Participatory democrats are
almost invariably attracted to the cause of individual growth and are
intrigued by its nature. They are resolutely convinced that a powerful
means to its realization would be a participatory community. Carole
Pateman is typical, consecrating the activity of citizens in direct self-
government because, she contends, it increases their sense of personal
competence and self-esteem and thus their participation. Atypical
about Pateman is her famous attempt to argue rather than proclaim this
crucial linkage by presenting studies of the efforts of employee par-
ticipation in a number of contexts to sustain her argument." Note that this popular idea, that direct participatory politics will
increase human esteem, assumes the model person is active, energetic,
self-confident, articulate, public—rather like the self-image of many
intellectuals. This model of the good person is endlessly held up as the
correct one. Indeed, at times it is lauded in a ritualistic manner suggest­ing its acceptance as a self-evident truth.21

None of these reasons for direct participatory politics necessarily connects immediately with community, but community is part of the thinking here, just not all of it by any means. For example, the bridge between individual development and community is to be found in what one learns (or, in how one develops as an individual), according to the participatory model. Among other things, one learns to be community-minded. The idea is that "the two terms participate and community are aspects of one single mode of social being: citizenship."22 Participation is an education into a public, shared, social life. It transforms "dependent, private individuals into free citizens"—people of a community.23 As participatory democrats articulate the goal, one can learn about others, their needs, and the broader social good beyond oneself through participation.24 Meanwhile the increased self-esteem generated will allow one to reach out to these others. Thus participation also promises more social or communal harmony.

The case that participation is indissolubly fused with community is often made by empirical studies. Again, Carol Pateman has been the honored exemplar. She draws on a lengthy series of investigations and interprets them to back her claim that direct political decision making is an agent for community, for "enhanced group harmony and sense of co-operation."25 Indeed, in general the case for participatory democracy comes armed with facts aiming to establish its empirical possibility and its attractions to a practical world. Although critics are skeptical, many participatory democrats insist that they be taken seriously on empirical grounds. They may be idealists, but they like to think that they are prepared to use the weapons of pragmatic Americans. Bowles and Gintis, for instance, argue at length that worker-run industries "are both more productive and give rise to higher levels of work satisfaction than capitalist-controlled firms." They make their empirical case and in the process underline the familiar approach.26

Three Faces of Participatory Community

Community is the goal of participatory democrats in many cases, if not the only objective, but there are really three faces to communi-
tarians who concentrate on this image of democracy. The first is the visage that participatory democracy often wears today, despite its flamboyant reputation—measured, chastened, alert to complexity and argument. For example, community is central to the case for participatory politics in Jane Mansbridge's sophisticated discussion, Beyond Adversary Democracy. Mansbridge is characteristic in her self-conscious sense of limits, her toned-down claims and enthusiasms. She has, for instance, no expectation that participatory democracy is really possible at a national level. In that realm it cannot generate a serious sense of community and "the assumption of a common good"; there are too many diverse interests. Of course, she is much more hopeful about possibilities for community (she calls them "unitary" possibilities) in small groups—especially work situations—in our nation. She is sure that the results would be a marvelous experience as long as community did not serve, as it would have to at a larger level, to suppress conflict. Her interesting case study of the young, committed workers at Helpline demonstrates the appeal of the workplace community. However, her study of the town meeting in "Shelby," Vermont, alerts her readers to the imperfect ideal that unitary, participatory politics can become if interests diverge and/or are not equal.

Consider the extensive and reflective explorations of Benjamin Barber in Strong Democracy; he too invokes many a cautionary nod. Although granting that any leadership in a participatory setting is problematic, he confesses that one must simply accept the necessity of leadership. Protests against this are beside the point to Barber, the correct issue being simply what kind of leadership. Barber then considers the possible alternatives and concludes, perhaps predictably, that leadership in its least authoritarian (and least authoritative) form, what he describes as "facilitating" leadership, is the best. He contends its great virtue is that it promotes the greatest group involvement and decision making since its only purpose is to do precisely that. But leadership it is, and we must frankly realize it.

Or note Barber's retreat from language which a few years ago was mandatory for those holding his views. He self-consciously distances himself from a participatory model in the ancient sense of a "way of life" and is explicitly hostile to the still more extravagant claim that
Participatory Community is the way of life.\textsuperscript{33} Rather, participatory politics is "a way of living."\textsuperscript{34} Although this distinction is not exactly self-evident, indeed it is downright murky, Barber's intended expression of chastened expectations is transparent.

Of course the self-restrained motif can end in subversion of the participatory ideal, and occasionally it does. Calls for a tough-minded communitarianism can turn out to be little more than the approval of a large, freely-taxing national government letting local communities have a say in how the money raised is spent.\textsuperscript{35} This is not quite the participatory ideal in structure or in spirit. Yet, on the whole, chastened does not mean abandonment of the ideal, nor does use of the communitarian language always imply addiction to statism.

This conclusion, however, is not obvious to the second face of participatory politics today, a version often recalling the 1960s. It does so in its ideas and designs for participatory existence as a way of life and in its proponents' passion for participatory community, which is not as obvious in contemporary voices such as Jane Mansbridge's. Kirkpatrick Sale's \textit{Human Scale}, for example, honors the spirit of this age by avoiding unrestrained architectonic impulses. Sale accepts the proposition that he must offer specific ideas in order to advance his desires. He would build as we all must build on something empirical: "No better guide has been found than the human form, no better means than the human scale."\textsuperscript{36} But though this conclusion is coupled with claims that his plan "is far from being utopian" and is "practical and possible," one can hardly doubt that his deepest disposition is to dream.\textsuperscript{37} Sale is obviously happiest when he breaks free from the conventional and designs utopias. He has, for example, two model societies, one of about five hundred people, the other of five to ten thousand, on which he has lavished great attention.\textsuperscript{38} He is sure they will be practical: Coordination via "networking" with other communities is quite possible, he expects, and community control and democracy will expand production.\textsuperscript{39} Yet the larger point is that Sale is a reminder of the 1960s because he is so passionate a believer in the participatory ideal. In him the dream lives on, and it is by no means always kept hidden. From time to time, it is right there, out in front, not marred by even a trace of self-conscious apology. Thus Sale breaks into almost lyrical affirma-
tions of what participatory politics would resemble and how it would transform us. We would metamorphose into supportive "participants and protagonists," "neighbors and lovers," "makers and creators."40

A quite popular genre of essays in support of participatory democracy derives from the small-group communities functioning today, communities sometimes originating in the 1960s, often considerably more recent, sometimes more or less permanent, sometimes not.41 Authors of these books accent the highly positive: smiling (youthful) faces, tales of success, and announcements that these experiments in community are about "new people," about learning how to change fear, selfishness, and conflict into love, cooperation, and sharing.42

The aura of these books radiates excitement as their authors rejoice in all that community can do, can be, and in some cases has become—sometimes in unlikely places and circumstances.43 Diversity (and comfortableness with that diversity) is a watchword in these experiments in community.44 Other cited advantages include growth in personal spirituality, psychological strength, freedom, and empowerment. The list is long.45

Supporters of participatory community contend that a historical tradition of community (or communities) exists in the United States, though they rarely agree that it has been mainstream. Yet they are confident that modern communitarians need not carve their way out of a strange and totally hostile wilderness46 and also that we have been learning progressive and positive things about community: that there must be a spiritual dimension or an acceptance of a reexamination of reflexive opposition to leadership under every circumstance.47 Above all, there is a belief that the future looks good for community, that present seeds promise much fruit.48

This zeal for communitarianism is notable because even amidst the optimism are a good many words of caution. They do not cloud the visions or diminish the expectations, but they place them in a certain context, one might say a recognizably contemporary context. Explicit recognition that a tempered mood is appropriate for the community of today abounds. Above all, experience gives them pause. There are warnings that "communities are not utopias where life is always easy and joyful,"49 and observations that the road to community is hard.50 One hears explicit discussions of specific problems, dilemmas, conflicts that occur in participatory settings, for example, how to get
idealis and realists, or thinkers and doers, to work together; or what to do with those who confuse community with dependence or with liberation from any work; or how to handle the frustration associated with too much work or too many meetings, activities which drove people from mainstream culture in the first place.51

A third face of participatory community is not entirely familiar: the face of populism. To locate populism in this context may seem puzzling. As an idea, populism has been associated with majoritarianism, sometimes in the negative sense of an unchecked and unthinking mob. Often connected with the Populist movement of late-nineteenth-century American history, its image as such has not always been good.52 Contemporary intellectuals sympathetic to populism are sometimes distinguished by their heroes but more often by their emphasis on informal, grass-roots, popular movements, regardless of their adherence to the more formal concepts/practices of participatory democracy.

Populism as part of the contemporary enthusiasm for participatory politics comes through two channels. One is historical: Populists often emphasize the people's rediscovery of their own and their nation's story, one which is partly the history of populism.53 Considerable work on what we might call populist movements has been done. In the process E. P. Thompson, the English social historian, has been quite influential through his explication of popular protest movements in nineteenth-century Britain.54 Thompson and other social historians sympathetic to popular movements have clearly influenced reinterpretations of the late-nineteenth-century American Populist movement.

As a result, American populists are no longer the mob of ignorant, anti-Semitic, country fanatics that their critics once saw. In some views, they have become concerned, active citizens, expressing "a remarkable democratic spirit," informed by "a broader vision of the common good," not at all in the service of the narrow, selfish interest of incompetent farmers. Lawrence Goodwyn's work has been especially important in this historical rehabilitation of American populists. His scholarship on Texas populism, detailed in its archival research and celebratory in its assessment, drives home a message about the achievements of Americans devoted to participatory community in our past.56

Today populist sympathizers sometimes reach far beyond the
farmers' revolts of the 1880s or 1890s to identify with larger parts of the American experience in the nineteenth century. Loyal to an older American vision, this is the fabled America of rural/small town life, one of community, local institutions, and direct democracy, not flawless but in many ways a participatory society (at least for white males). De Tocqueville also described this world, though he did not think it so self-evidently attractive as its contemporary proponents believe. This is not the point, however, because populists invoke historical images of past Americas more to fault the present and to establish their legitimacy than to indulge in nostalgia. History is, as we have seen, a favorite weapon in the contemporary communitarian strategy.

Populist participatory community reaches American political thought today also through the channel of contemporary analyses. Populists such as the prolific Harry Boyte and his associates glowingly report on the outbreak of popular movements in concrete political situations—"spaces"—quite apart from theories of participatory government or traditional labels. Popular action and popular communities as they happen are their interest and their passion—journeys in the populist cast of participatory community. For some of its advocates ours can be a heady time. They see populism poking its head up everywhere, and so they judge it to be by far the largest movement toward democratic community in the United States today. Wherever they look they can encounter populist activism, in rural communities, in neighborhood organizations, in citizen action groups on the state and local levels. Each evidence underlines for populists their belief that participation must be a dynamic, grass-roots experience rather than a formal philosophy. Thus the interest in observing spontaneous outbursts of popular action and in savoring their potential: "participatory, egalitarian, and open character" for public life, "the heart of democratic movements." Each allows another chance to affirm populist loyalty to the "potential of the ordinary person."

Often less developed is the relationship between society on the local scale—people and experiments that contemporary populists welcome—and society on the larger scale. There is some reluctance, perhaps, to explore such a comparison. Yet the lesson of the populist movement in the late nineteenth century may be sobering in that the decision was made then to go past localism toward national action, a
national program, and a national party. To do so may have been necessary, but the movement did not survive.

It is also important to identify carefully just what populist-oriented thinkers seek; goals can vary widely. For example, Goodwyn is in love (it is not too strong to say) with the historic populists he studied because they lived the kind of decentralized democratic community he favors above all else and because they sought to transform the world through this model. They were a movement which sought to be a community.62

Some other contemporary populists appear to be concerned first for popular power, "empowerment" they call it.63 To be sure, the local and/or single-issue movements which populists respect have aspects of community too. These communities, though, are more open and loose bounded than many communities based on ideas of participatory democracy and are less models than events, less communities than sometimes short-lived experiences.64 There are, in fact, many claimants to populism in American political life, and self-declared populists often are extremely generous in their use of the term, including almost everything and every person they like.65 Even a postmodern populism now stresses feminism, holism, environmentalism, marching right in step with the latest trends.66

By no means are all populists on the Left. People such as Goodwyn or Boyte belong on the Left because for them populism is not just grass-roots democracy but egalitarianism in economic and political terms. For other populists economic egalitarianism is not central, but popular determinations of cultural practices and values are; and their judgments, one suspects, would vary widely from those of a Goodwyn or a Boyte. Both varieties of populism stress popular will, of course, but the contexts are different. Populism is like existentialism and need imply no particular agenda on policy, though it does routinely if vaguely embrace community.

Populists on the left are, not surprisingly, extremely anxious to discredit other contenders for their sacred word. According to some of them, the use of "populism" by others, especially conservatives, turns out to be an exercise in mystification and distortion. It amounts to being a fraudulent scheme which lauds participatory power but carefully protects rule by the economic elites whom populists on the Left
see everywhere. Nor can it be taken to honor authentic community. More accurately, it is a scam allowing the entrenched economic elites to grab all they can while affirming the interests of community. Conservative populist movements, in short, turn out in practice to encourage "Powerlessness, Tinsel, and Greed." In conservative hands populism represents a "static, narrow, and defensive" world, obsessed with "order and stability," dominated by reactionary impulses which strengthen vested economic elites.

Such analyses raise persistent questions about populism (among other versions of community): What is the ideal that intellectual advocates are pursuing here? Is the goal community (variously conceptualized)? Is it a community which dependably (or conveniently) will generate politically correct policy outcomes? Or, is there any difference between a proper community, populist or otherwise, and one which is reliable as to policy? Indeed, the larger issue is whether populism's supporters seek it for democratic community or as a form of policy advocacy.

Arguments Regarding Participatory Democracy

Supporters of participatory community hardly live in a vacuum. They are part of the conversation, sometimes intense, over the attractions of community, particularly participatory community. No vision of community draws more criticism than participatory democracy today, and no advocates are more zealous in defense of their vision.

Yet participatory democrats can hardly ignore two major reservations. One is both normative and empirical in content, the other empirical alone. First is the query of why a democrat concerned for reflective and egalitarian participation in community decisions should find participatory democracy attractive. Put sharply, does participatory democracy guarantee a community that will be both too authoritarian and generally too tightly bounded?

This question arises often and with good reason. Behind it lies the fear that in participatory settings restraints on the exercise of power by the majority or those manipulating the group are few. Democracy, not to speak of an authentic community, can disappear in popular enthusiasms. Critics insist that individual rights must be guaranteed and
that considerable pluralism in any participatory community is a necessity. They argue that such assurances are needed, moreover, not just for protection but also for the freedom to develop the existential self. There is plenty of unease that conformism in small communities can starve the human spirit and mind, a cost too common in any tightly bounded group. Thus communities must be open and pluralistic, but this is not simple to accomplish. How much trust can one maintain while also celebrating openness and development and pluralism?

Applied to an economic form of participatory community the related query asks what the limits and costs of egalitarianism will be. Critics fear the worship of economic equality pursued in the name of community, which leaves less community than conformity and a lifeless, unproductive economy. They wonder how many people want to have the community of the poor.

Also inextricably normative and empirical is the dilemma of authority in participatory community. Participatory democrats do not, as a rule, like to think about authority, except to go on record as being opposed to it. Authority and duty are concepts which do not capture the libertarian (or the 1960s) spirit often infusing these discussions. It is much more popular and characteristic to inveigh against the evils of power and the concepts of "rule over," "totalism," and "unitary" order. However, declaring one's opposition to domination does not really satisfy those who are uneasy about problems of power, much less of authority, in participatory communities.

Authority and power are not likely to go away; to expect otherwise is simply not credible in the light of human experience. Thus they have to be dealt with by proponents of participatory community. Moreover, they are needed in such a setting in order to promote such allied ideals as economic equality or even political equality. Only the naive can expect that sentiments of communal equality will bring everyone along.

Some thinkers try harder than others to respond, but the discussion of this concern is too modest. It is not enough to take a kind of high ground and insist that no one except the perverse or mean spirited could deny the concept of participatory community as an ideal. Such a stance betrays insufficient appreciation that problems of authority and power may be inherent in the ideal itself.

Yet some able intellectuals do not wish away the challenges, such
as Jane Mansbridge in her complex and atypically reserved analysis. True, Mansbridge does not wrestle directly and determinedly with the conundrum of authority in the participatory community, but she is acutely sensitive to related questions on the potential normative drawbacks of participatory politics. Thus although she is highly sympathetic to unitary democracy, she is so only when there is a unity incorporating shared interests. She knows that fraud can be practiced under the name of community or democracy, and she is not sympathetic when such a community masks conflicts, as is inevitable sometimes, or when equal representation is sacrificed.\textsuperscript{75} Perhaps this makes Mansbridge no more than a qualified participatory communitarian. It is not her language when she sternly urges “adversary watchfulness” whenever conflicts exist (and always at the national level).\textsuperscript{76} But such reservations do not alter where her heart is. They are just a response to normative anxieties about domination which she discovered to be empirically legitimate (if exaggerated) when she went into the field to study participatory democracies. The empirical side of her work fits nicely with the critique of participatory community that its enthusiasts must constantly address. Skeptics on all sides, including some who attach a certain, perhaps romantic, legitimacy to the ideal, have continually dismissed participatory community as impractical. The focus is always on practicality in terms of a large society; the dilemma is that a society small enough to be a community cannot simultaneously be big enough to be effective.

From one angle the practicality of participatory community does not fundamentally matter. Surely its normative status as an ideal can be defended in any case. But for the intellectual advocates of participatory community its viability matters enormously. After all, everything in America must eventually appear able to pass a pragmatic test, even if it obviously cannot, even if it probably should not. Thus these democrats make a major effort to meet objections and to fashion a practical case for participatory community.

The work of Carole Pateman and Benjamin Barber illustrates how legitimate this task is in participatory circles. It is crucial to them and they seize the opportunity.\textsuperscript{77} They argue, for example, that participatory politics (incorporating workers’ control) can pass tests in the real world because industrial experiments show that it has;\textsuperscript{78} because considerable experience in Yugoslavia shows its empirical possibilities;\textsuperscript{79}
because the neo-Hobbesian alternative of Western economic life works much less well, mired in waste, inefficiency, popular distaste—ironically all charges hurled at economic democracy.\textsuperscript{80} We are offered a barrage of empirical and historical studies, or interpretations of them, to establish that this is a tough-minded and empirical approach strong enough to match any other.

The feasibility of the ideal is also questioned because of other problems in a major economy where coordination and consumer satisfaction will be essential. There is the issue of how to maintain a common defense in a modern age when a people's militia may not be quite enough. Advocates also have to confront those who charge that in practical terms participatory community is impossible because it faces an almost inevitable fate of degeneration into community-denying parochialism and closed-mindedness. In this context the reply that much good will come of "empathetic imagination, common talk, and common action" is debatable.\textsuperscript{81}

Yet the range of practical difficulties acknowledged by participatory intellectuals can be broad. To illustrate, Goodwyn notes the challenges posed by race, ethnicity, religion, region, different histories, and the like. Each can derail popular communitarian dreams. Such awareness is of considerable value in Goodwyn's perception of the richness of actual human history. The respect many other participatory democrats have for these dimensions of human definition and history is uncertain. Participatory communities vary in how loose bounded a spirit their authors envisage for them.\textsuperscript{82}

Roberto Unger, priest of the leftish critical legal studies movement, has expressed both sides of the participatory mood, first cautiously but now without restraint. He has long been a celebrant of "the experience of empowerment," absolutely sure that it will assist people as they reach for "love, faith, and hope."\textsuperscript{83} He is also certain that self-assertion and conflicts will never entirely disappear and is confident that they can provide opportunities for communities to break through the blockade that stands in the way of resolution of differences and dilemmas.\textsuperscript{84} His confidence in dialectical possibilities is real and has expanded sharply.

Until recently, Unger was also given to noting that wonderful as it is, community could threaten the individual and conflicts could damage community.\textsuperscript{85} He agreed that the goal was to develop a system that
brings together in theory and practice democratic community and the empowerment it promises with respect for individuals and their privacy. Although he declared "nothing is beyond" politics "inherently or forever," he considered guarantees for human respect essential. He had to, since he believed that by "its very nature, community is always on the verge of becoming oppressive." He proposed a sober choice, not for utopia, but for taking a risk to advance human fulfillment communally and individually.

Of late, however, Unger has swung toward urging far greater risks. He now favors people’s reaching toward freedom or liberation by their actively breaking down institutions and destroying existing contexts. He has turned to a sort of postmodern anarchism, a process which he insists will be a permanent necessity. Everywhere and always boundaries close in on one and perpetual smashing of them is essential.

Though optimism sometimes leads some participatory communitarians to ignore doubts about such community, Unger seems more driven by desperation. He is frightened by the power of context, institutions, traditions, customs, and the like. They haunt him, and his fears suggest he has little confidence in people’s ability to sort out their lives and their desires. No wonder Unger’s latest direction is attacked as limited in its understanding (and appreciation) of people and their wants. Certainly his demands on people are great, complex, and perhaps contradictory: He wants kind and caring people who are militantly independent and who constantly change and upset the settled order in all things. Who will ever rest in his universe? And how would one fashion community?

Debate and disagreement over conceptions of human nature are always the greatest stumbling block for participatory community. In truth, few advocates of such community do not believe that people are fundamentally sound and cooperative or that they can develop deep capacity for cooperation (and internal checks). Often this judgment is literally a matter of faith for intellectuals who may seem—even to themselves—strangers to the twentieth century. Where others see pride, selfishness, or sin as integral to our century and our being, they stress hope and possibility in the language of psychological optimism, growth, and development.

Neither simple declarations that participatory politics “posits the
social nature of human beings in the world” or for "a temperate spirit" or for institutionalized ombudsmen close the gap between the optimists of the participatory ideal and the skeptics; perhaps nothing really can. But as Eric Gorham reminds us the risk and dilemma of hope is to some extent present for most liberals or democrats, just as it was for Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill.

Herbert Gans represents one effort to do the nearly impossible. He concedes the challenge of motivating people to enter politics and political institutions, indeed all institutions today. The goal must be, therefore, to bring political institutions to people if one seeks participatory politics. Gans proposes to make political institutions much more open, to create more lobbying opportunities, more pluralism in the media, more polling, anything and everything which might facilitate participation by lowering its costs.

Still, reservations are appropriate about enthusiasm over the results of participation. "Empowerment does not unfold a magical process that immediately wipes away all human frailties." To say "empowerment," "local," or "decentralized" is not necessarily to say "democratic" or "effective." Many of the doubts about participatory democracy have their historical origins in reactions to Hitler, to Stalin, and to the Holocaust and other events in the twentieth century which cast no good light on group political behavior. Nor have the studies of voting provided some observers with much inspiration. No doubt it is useful to see the intimate connection between participatory communitarians and the optimism of the generation of the 1960s; but it is uncertain whether empirical and historical discussion can answer anything in this realm or whether we are in a world ultimately beyond their reach. Thus it is refreshing to encounter Benjamin Barber. He grants at once that there is inevitably an irreducible element of risk in his participatory goal. "Is it possible that you are wrong, that your vision of a common future omits contingencies or nurtures pathologies that will be my undoing? Our undoing? . . . There is no answer to this query."

Economic Democracy

There is measurable awareness among participatory enthusiasts today that communities of political equality face structural realities
which make their realization daunting. The favorite example is the frustration associated with taming capitalism. This judgment goes hand in hand with the frequent perception that serious participatory democracy must apply directly to the economic institutions which are so much a part of people’s lives. Especially for Left-leaning intellectuals a participatory community must include direct involvement in self-government by workers (employees) in decentralized work settings. Indeed, allegiance to such a view is a major article in the catechism of the contemporary American Left and has been since the late 1960s.

As in Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers’s *On Democracy*, most versions of economic democracy endorse the usual features of the participatory ideal of democracy. They affirm civil and political liberties, maximum decentralization of decision making, emphasis on political, social, and economic equality, focus on a public perspective, and the value of common deliberation over goals. What is particular is the extension of participatory democracy to economic (and other) institutions. For us the question is, what reasons are given for moving in this direction? How much is community the motive force here?

The questions are definitely relevant. There are economic democrats for whom economic democracy and decentralization are the means to a community-oriented society. They want people to control all sides of their lives in a collective setting at as local a level as possible. To leave out the workplace would be to split people’s lives, not to fashion community. For others community grows in “the revitalization of our mores and our public life.” Therefore, to bring economic life and economic institutions into a public forum makes it possible for people to think and act as a broad and encompassing community and to develop the skills for self-governance so necessary for free, democratic life. It speeds both democracy in action and education for democracy.

Some economic democrats argue that there need not be any cost in terms of standard of living. Others suspect there may be real costs, but they are not necessarily upset that their system might—or would—reduce growth or even the GNP. As Michael Harrington remarks, the ultimate goal of (his) economic democracy is not a burgeoning GNP but a flourishing community.

Thus community, though rarely community alone, is often a goal
Much more rarely, though, do advocates of economic democracy establish community as their principal end. There is no such agreement, a reality which can be obscured by the pleasant exhortations and affirmations some economic democrats offer. In fact, community is often not quite the point for economic democrats. Community may receive praise and, though frequently undefined, be one of the benefits promised. Yet other goals can crowd the picture. It is not at all unusual to hear economic democracy lauded for its eminently practical benefits, for what it can accomplish—increased production, improved working conditions, or smoother labor-management relations. At a philosophical level, many economic democrats are clearly more engaged by something else: justice. Economic justice is what they want, a goal they interpret as the achievement of a highly egalitarian economic and social system. The point is not that such justice-seeking intellectuals reject community, but that its allure is often secondary to them. Problems such as social meaning, relationships, and cohesion do not escape them, but they frequently skirt the psychological, not to say spiritual, analyses that are absolutely central to engagement with the ideal of community. They prefer to summon people to economic justice.

Two rather contrasting examples are the arguments of C. B. MacPherson and Robert Dahl. The late C. B. MacPherson, long associated with economic democracy, was a combative critic of the limitations of Western democracy and an admirer of the putative evidences of democracy in non-Western Marxist regimes. He was not, however, an assertive disciple of community. MacPherson stressed instead issues of equality, especially economic equality. He also had ideas about the kind of citizens he wanted in society, and he knew what kind of spirit he did not want in his citizens. His famous and influential critique of possessive individualism, the rapacious and unconnected individualism which he contended dominates liberal, capitalist societies, is strong testimony here. But nowhere does he really concentrate on community. And MacPherson’s assurances to the contrary, merely making a democracy into “an equal human society” does not address those whose major goal is community. What it does do, though, is reaffirm what MacPherson is all about: economic equality.

Thus for MacPherson the standard for democracy was never its success as a community, just as community was not a normative goal.
MacPherson faults Western liberal democracy not because it falls short of his ideal of community but because it is interconnected with the capitalism he hates and the economic inequality he intensely opposes.\textsuperscript{114}

MacPherson seriously entertained use of the word “democratic” for Marxist states because he associated democracy with equality. Never mind MacPherson’s embarrassing ignorance of the inequality in these nations; the point is his definition of democracy. Of course, he knew that his view met rejection from those whose conceptions of democracy have something to do with popular rule, majority decision, or the like. But even here MacPherson was so anxious to promote the legitimacy of economically egalitarian states that he argued one-party states could still satisfy democratic standards if they had at least some intraparty democracy.\textsuperscript{115} MacPherson defended the larger philosophical point that ends are what matter. He then concluded that third-world, one-party states and other forms of authoritarian rule can be democratic, for if governors enact what the people want, all is well—especially if what they want is an anticapitalist economic equality.\textsuperscript{116} In any case, there is no invocation to community here.

What is most intriguing about an economic democrat such as Robert Dahl is his openly acknowledged disinterest in community.\textsuperscript{117} His brand of economic democracy is unambiguous in its goals: economic equality, and through it, political equality to achieve economic justice and other equalities which permit human development and liberty. Not for Dahl any sentimental affirmations of community as a human teleology or primary social goal.\textsuperscript{118}

Dahl is quite explicit that many other democrats are not to be taken seriously in their conceptions of democracy, including the usual participatory democrat and the republicans. For Dahl they are essentially romantics and lack concrete agendas for the realization of their often proclaimed ideals.\textsuperscript{119}

Dahl is no socialist or socialist communitarian either. Socialism's record does not impress him, certainly not in the increasingly messy Yugoslavia, once the favorite of earnest participatory democrats. He finds the answer in an affirmation of popular involvement at all levels of government and in the extension of democratic governance to private business. Such a move will not only enable political democracy to be equal but will also bring under the rubric of democracy the enor-
mously important economic realm. The result will not necessarily be community, but it will be democracy as far as Dahl is concerned. He first developed this understanding of democracy forty years ago. Wondering about workers' control, he concluded that perhaps modern interdependency made the goal elusive and energetically insisted that socialist democracy must be about a good deal more than planning. Now he has come back to the idea that workers' involvement is essential, though not for some soft ideal of community.

Socialism's modern enthusiasts also favor equality, yet they can be equally sympathetic to the language of liberty. This is certainly true, for instance, in the rewarding work of Bowles and Gintis. They reject liberalism, to be sure, but they do so in good part in the name of a full liberty, not in the name of a socialist community. Liberty, as they understand it, requires ending economic dependence to the maximum possible extent. Because capitalism (or any other weakly controlled or mediated economic system) allows such dependence it must be attacked for the liberty-denying agent it is. The same applies to patriarchal authority wherever it still casts its shadow. It breeds dependence, denies liberty, and thus impedes viable community.

Beside liberty marches community. Liberty is, for Bowles and Gintis, a precondition for community, as are economic equality in and popular rule over economic institutions. Liberty will assist people in discovering their essential beings, their social and communal natures, whose fulfillment in turn will expand practical liberty and actual community. The hope and the expectation is that in the end both liberty (though not the liberty to exploit others economically) and community will expand together. With this analysis in mind, one should note the important voices on the American intellectual Left for whom the socialist dream must, finally, usher in community.

Accent on justice also finds expression in Michael Walzer's splendid Spheres of Justice, widely discussed and admired in our time. Walzer is something of a pluralist and a liberal, something of a participatory democrat and Jewish communitarian, something of an economic democrat and socialist. His primary emphasis is not the consecration of a society of participatory politics or economic equality or anything else quite so simple. He articulates a far more complicated justice than what he patronizes as "simple equality." What he has in mind is that we honor alternative conceptions of justice depending
strictly on the realm of life. In short, he is a pluralist regarding justice. Not that just any view is acceptable; in every instance and in every sphere the case for what would be justice must be argued, and Walzer does so.\textsuperscript{126} The pluralistic result, as he molds it, is fascinating and impressive as his discussion roams over education, leisure, welfare, the justice of gifts, citizenship, and much more.\textsuperscript{127}

Walzer insists that what is appropriate justice in each arena must depend in part on concrete culture and history (here he skates close to traditionalists). Justice is not an abstract philosophical question that one can pursue outside of a particular culture or history or a specific sphere. Thus grand theorists of justice from Plato to John Rawls are no heroes to him.\textsuperscript{128}

He brings the same reservations to the ideal of a participatory democratic community with which he has often been associated. He is sympathetic to the ideal as he conceives it; for him the ideal must be seriously devoted to real politics. Thus he is not vulnerable to the accusation haunting some participatory communitarians, that of being nonpolitical or antipolitical.\textsuperscript{129} Walzer’s model incorporates conflict, disagreement, dialogue within his community to bring about the realization of politics. And yet for him this ideal, though just, is limited since justice varies by sphere. Participatory community cannot and should not override the plurality of spheres and their particular understanding of justice; that is exactly what tyranny is about. Participatory community must be sensitive to the possibility of casual or arbitrary exercise of power, which for Walzer is a warning most applicable to the populist and to “push-button participation.”\textsuperscript{130} Neither justice nor democracy nor community is about some superficial majority rule.

The absence of a neat guide as to “where to put the fences; they have no natural [abstract right] location” does not mean there should be no fences; Walzer argues that there should always be many fences.\textsuperscript{131} The different spheres, degrees, modulations result not in a cardboard participatory vision but in the modern vision, circumscribed but also very much alive in modern American communitarian thinking. Walzer’s ideas may offer a summary of where participatory thinking has arrived today. Certainly he is a peerless articulator of the communitarian ideal.