The Macksey Journal

Volume 2 Article 37

2021

Shattered Stories; Authority's Decline and Its Consequences

Carter M. Brassington
Albertus Magnus College

Recommended Citation
Brassington, Carter M. (2021) "Shattered Stories; Authority's Decline and Its Consequences," *The Macksey Journal*: Vol. 2, Article 37.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Macksey Journal by an authorized editor of The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal.

Published by JHU Macksey Journal, 2021

Shattered Stories: Authority's Decline and Its Consequences

Carter Brassington

Albertus Magnus College

Abstract

Hannah Arendt's essay "What is Authority?" provides the basis for this essay, which examines authority in the contemporary world. As democracy seems to be in decline, increasing power is given to unaccountable, and usually unquestionable people, who typically fit into one of five archetypes, in one of two cultural tendencies. From technocrats to spiritualists, strongmen to crusaders, and interpreters, these "styles" being anti-democratic have become common. Losing faith in democracy and trusting the various archetypes would be a mistake. After analyzing each of these in detail, the paper moves on to an argument in favor of editing democracy, drawing on the work of Hélène Landmore in *Open Democracy*.

Keywords: Arendt, Democracy, Authority, Political Philosophy

The authority of institutions has declined in the wake of criticism. It seems that representative democracy has failed, or at least is in retreat. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, global democracy is at its lowest point since 2006. Focusing on the United States, 2019 polling data shows 41 percent of Americans consider the low level of confidence

citizens have in government to be a major problem, and 64 percent say it is at least somewhat difficult to tell the difference between what is true and what is false when listening to a politician (Rainie et al.). The decline of trust is not simply confined to the government either. Eighty-two percent of Americans claim that large corporations have too much power over the economy, and 70 percent believe that the economy is essentially rigged (Igielnik). Only 27 percent of Americans say they can trust banks (McCarthy).

In the United States, divisions in education, income, interest and geography have given rise to two very distinct cultures. Both Gertrude Himmelfarb, the mother of the modern neoconservative movement, and Ezra Klein, a leading voice in the democratic socialist movement, have acknowledged in print that there are two Americas, and linked this twoness to political polarization. Himmelfarb frames the split in terms of moral attitude, pointing to "evidence of moral disarray on the one hand and of a religious-cum-moral revival on the other" (240) that pervades in modern America, while Klein points to differences in population density, religion and race (107-108). As a result, the figures who wield authority now generally are in one of those two cultural groups, loosely tied to the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively. These two different and almost diametrically opposed cultures form the spaces in which the various holders of authority now operate.

Already in 1953, political theorist Hannah Arendt was writing about the decline of authority. Arendt argued that "one aspect of our concept of authority is Platonic in origin" (93) as Plato sought a way of governing which was neither force nor persuasion. He sought to create a narrative which would legitimize the rule of a philosopher king. Authority binds those who accept it to act as commanded by those who hold it. Arednt saw authority was declining in

1953, as people were continuing to rethink the way the world was set up, especially colonial, racial and economic hierarchies. This trend has accelerated over time, and nearly all traditions and institutions are being questioned.

Sociologist Max Weber distinguished between three types of authority. As he saw it, authority could be drawn from an individual's charisma, from some kind of tradition, or from a rational legal process. Weber also described a process of "routinization," wherein a person's charismatic authority is turned into rational-legal authority by his or her successors. This process typically occurred after the death of the charismatic person and was generally done by creating some kind of institution to carry on their legacy. Christianity started out as a religion focused on the charismatic authority of Jesus, and was eventually routinized, with various churches gaining a kind of traditional authority from being successors of Jesus.

One might say that the contemporary era is one of "de-routinization." The only rational-legal and traditional forms of authority in government and business have been replaced by charismatic ones. This has happened in numerous areas over the past several decades. This lack of trust can be seen in nearly every aspect of life; systems do not seem trustworthy anymore. The first two parts of this paper offer an analysis of the various individualized conceptions of authority that have emerged to replace the old institutions. There are two primary tendencies, tech gurus and political strongmen, with some variations within each. From the "technocrat" Elon Musk to the "interpreter" Donald Trump, each of these figures have authority which is largely centered on a desire to replace institutions in a way which is more favorable to the cultural group who is backing them. This replacement, as will be discussed, seems incomplete and generally lacks a democratic element. The final section provides a possible solution, a

suggestion for how democracy might be improved and made more resilient to the new challenges. The institutions of the past have failed, and the individuals who have sought to replace them have as well. As a result, there is no one left to lead the people, which might not be a bad thing.

Part One: Tech Gurus

There is an ethos around Silicon Valley which stresses individuals over groups or institutions. Often valorized in the media and seen as almost superhuman in intelligence, these people often represent a hopeful, tech-driven vision of the future. Because of their tech focus and combination of vision, the most accurate term for these charismatic luminaries is "tech-guru." These figures combine some technical skill with a grand vision for changing society. The tech part comes from technological innovation, while the guru part expresses these figures ' promise to save humanity. This mode of authority allows people who have some sort of special knowledge or ability to translate that into the right to be heard on virtually all matters. Whether that change is through the person's unique ability to invent new things, see what others can't, or manage a complex system, this tendency of authority is always progressive in the sense of looking forward toward an imagined better world, and tech-gurus are often also politically progressive. This also serves the purpose of creating an opposition which makes the narrative of the tech-guru more compelling. The following section of this paper will give three examples of people who embody different forms of this tech-guru tendency, and the section after that will discuss two forms of political strongmen.

The Technocrat

Elon Musk is a strange figure. He regularly engages in publicity stunts in both business and personal life, which seem designed to appeal to teenage boys, such as, changing the price of his car to $69,420 (Hawkins), trying to name his son X Æ A-12, or declaring, falsely, that he had created a bionic pig. The California Department of Health did not allow the name (Bologna). The pig, which Musk claimed was interfaced with a computer, was actually just part of an elaborate bit of science theatre (Regalado). This is because much of Elon Musk's success, and by extension his fortune, rely more on his charisma rather than his rational-legal ability.

Thanks to his continued success, a kind of cult has emerged around Elon Musk. A quick glance at r/ElonMusk reveals unyielding praise, posters are widely available of him, as are a plethora of YouTube videos teaching people how to be more like him. He is some combination of rock-star and prophet. He has a clear vision, demonstrated by his habitual practice of outlining clear goals for himself and his company. Elon Musk's overarching vision seems to be to save humanity from its worst excesses. He declared in an interview with Rolling Stone that Climate change "is the biggest threat that humanity faces this century, except for AI" (Strauss). His two main companies; SpaceX and Tesla, both provide a vision of solutions to the problem of climate change.

Planet Earth is somewhat erratic. It has already gone through five extinction events, and there may be a sixth on the horizon. In order to avoid this, humanity needs a backup planet. This is SpaceX's goal, to ensure that humanity can continue even if Earth cannot. Musk has spoken about his goal of one day sending a million people to Mars, just in case (Mosher). It is worth noting that questions of who should be allowed to go to space, and for what price, are

not answered. There is no sense of any politics at play in Musk's vision. It is simply about him getting humanity from point A to point B through force of will.

There are also reasons to doubt the efficacy of Musk's will. In 2018, he suggested Tesla would be able to produce a 25,000-dollar car within three years. When 2021 came, he pushed the date back another three years. Musk also started a project called "The Boring Company" which was supposed to drill under the Earth in order to create an electric hyperloop to manage traffic. This never materialized. Musk has also predicted that a million fully self-driving Teslas would be on the road by 2020, while as of 2021 the company has yet to produce a single fully autonomous vehicle. This was after he suggested Tesla would be creating all solar roofs by 2019, another product which they have yet to create (McFarlane). All of this suggests there are reasons to doubt Musk, and there are many who do, but for many, the promise of a real-life Iron Man who will solve all of the problems is highly alluring.

It is also fundamentally undemocratic, however. The people are not given any say in what money will be invested in what kind of research and development. This makes sense, as it is his company, but that fact conflicts with the world-saving ambitions of the company. Musk's ventures have even started to usurp projects which were traditionally the purview of governments, as the Hyper-Loop, an infrastructure project Musk created, shows. Because Tesla and SpaceX are private companies trying to save the world, they are only going to be saving the parts which it is most profitable to save, a notion which should be greatly worrying for an increasingly unequal society. None of Musk's plans give humanity at large a say in its own destiny, what will happen is dependent on the ability and goodwill of a single, largely unaccountable, man. While Musk is all about using technology to improve one's life, one can be

a tech-guru and a luddite at the same time, favoring the natural over the man-made but still believing a kind of technology is necessary to save the world.

The Spiritualist

Mukhade Singh, born Christopher Sanborn, is the founder and CEO of a company called Alive Water. Alive Water sells water, but with a few differences from a regular water bottle company. The first is that they sell their water in 2.5 gallon jugs made of glass. As the values page on the company's website explains, "91% of plastics are not recycled. Every minute one garbage truck of plastic is dumped into our oceans." The other twist is that Alive Water's water is not treated with any chemicals. It is gathered from the Opal Springs in central Oregon, and no additional processing is done to it. This means that the water is "raw."

The raw water movement gained traction in 2017. As the *New York Times* reported, those in the movement have a "wariness of tap water, particularly the fluoride added to it and the lead pipes that some of it passes through." There are certainly reasons to be skeptical; the article points to Flint Michigan's water crisis as a reason for the lack of trust in the water grid. The same year the raw water movement started to catch on, a study published in *Human Reproductive Update* showed sperm counts had fallen by 59 percent from 1973 to 2011, and those born in 2045 will not be able to have children at all. There is evidence to suggest per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances or PFAS are to blame. These chemicals, which do not break down in nature, have been linked to infertility in both males and females (Nisio et al). It thus makes sense when those in the raw water movement express their distrust for "the water grid" and describe themselves as "water consciousness movement" (Bowles). Having realized that

governments do not appear to be up to the task of providing water, they turn to nature. They express an interest in the sacredness of nature: a belief that the world is inherently mystical or perhaps even divine. Such sentiments are echoed in Alive Water's webpage, which proclaims that "[m]ore love and appreciation for water is intrinsic to our own self growth." Those who support the raw water movement may not even be aware of the specifics, everyone knows that pollution is a problem. It feels like drinking water from a hot spring is cleaner, even if it will actually do nothing about the problem, as spring water has all of the same risks with regards to plastic, plus the lack of treatment means the water might also have harmful bacteria.

Singh himself speaks of the company's mission in stark terms. When invited to the Daily Show for a rare mainstream news interview, Singh was asked what his qualifications were to be selling the water. His response was to mention he "studied a lot of yoga and self-meditation," implying that his knowledge was gained through some kind of spiritual practice or connection to one's self. He also made oblique references to his belief in 9/11 trutherism. Both of these factors suggest a kind of spiritualism which is skeptical of institutions, especially government.

Alive Water makes clear another characteristic of tech-gurus. They are not religious, but often have some sort of messianic vision. Their taking the place of governments is by no means an accident. Their vision often rests on the idea of improving things which the government does poorly. This is usually connected to some kind of special knowledge the guru claims to have. Oftentimes, they will frame themselves not as heartless capitalists looking out for their bottom line, but heartfelt humanitarians seeking to change humanity for the better. Doing so imparts an additional meaning to the work they do. In emphasizing personal, spiritual knowledge and experience, they claim to speak for something deeper than the collective knowledge and

experience that everyone might share. There is a skepticism toward collective institutions, be they municipalities dealing with water or governments dealing with the complicated political entanglements around the world. This skepticism leads to a desire to replace these flawed democratic institutions with perfected and private ones. Sometimes they even go as far as to become modern Caesars, threatening the very foundations of the Republic.

The Manager

In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Mark Zuckerberg joked about his fondness for classical architecture, specifically statues of Augustus. He observed that he was interested in Augustus as a complex figure, arguing Augustus had "a really harsh approach" but "he established two hundred years of world peace." Augustus certainly had brutal methods. He was suspected of having his own grandson killed and eliminated all political opponents, making himself the absolute ruler of the Roman Empire. He did bring an end to the near-constant civil war in the Roman Republic, but in doing so he destroyed all vestiges of that Republic. In addition, Augustus did not create world peace and did not even create 200 years of peace for the Roman Empire, as the Empire continued engaging in foreign wars. He simply ended a period of internal instability, which was certainly impressive (Osnos).

Zuckerberg himself has brought about a peace of sorts. Facebook has become a center for the internet and an important means of connecting people. That is not to say it is without flaws. The company created an elaborate data harvesting system. This allowed Facebook to micro-target ads, which were highly effective. Personalized and targeted ads got nearly five times as many clicks as regular ads, according to one study (Tucker 550). These ads allowed Facebook to take in incredible amounts of revenue, and Facebook did not just stop at its users:

it collected data on people who never signed up, as Zuckerberg himself has publicly admitted (Frier).

The cons of Facebook go far beyond this. In India, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, Facebook has been used to disseminate hateful propaganda, which has led directly to ethnic violence. Facebook has generally tried to avoid moderation, and the sheer scale of the number of messages being sent makes it hard for the platform to effectively police itself. The consequences of this can be deadly. In 2012 in Mynmmar various anti-Muslim messages were posted on Facebook, leading to violence against them. While these messages did cross Facebook's threshold for hate speech, they were left up, sometimes for four days, sometimes permanently. At the same time members of the Rohignya, a Muslim ethnic group in Myanmar, had their posts taken down simply for exposing government human rights abuses (Fink 48).

A less directly violent, but certainly important issue is the increase in the number of teenagers with depression and other mental health issues. Anxiety alone has risen 70 percent in the past 25 years (Shirley and Inkster, 8). Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, seems to be by far the worst for teen's mental health (25). Instagram presents a twisted form of democracy. Like other social media, the goal is not to spread ideas or reason through problems. Instagram is much more like a mob, whatever is the most pleasing at the moment gets the most likes, what is not pleasing must be destroyed.

Social media of this nature presents a world which is consumed by image, without any time for reasoned debate or deliberation. Inflammatory stories about the evils of one group or another are easily shared. The impulse of the people to have their voice heard is channeled into largely irrelevant decisions. There are dozens of articles on the internet about the ideal angle or

lighting or position one ought to have to achieve the maximum number of likes. Sure, this appeals to people, but it seems wrong that people are able to gain social prestige, and in many cases wealth, simply for being able to take pictures. There is no real sense of oversight. Private corporations do not have to listen to the broader populace, and are not really accountable to them in any serious way. Not only are these tech gurus doubtful of the government's abilities to solve problems, and do not trust most institutions, the companies they found often derive profit at the expense of democracy itself.

Tech-gurus do not appear worthy of trust: not in their ability to solve complex social problems, or to create meaning in life, and certainly not in improving or helping to design democracy. By relying simply on how to design something more efficiently, whether it is more efficient data collection or more efficient communication, any of the ethical implications are left by the wayside. Tech-gurus seem very good at creating profit, or at least they are very good at convincing investors they will create profit, but little outside of that. There must be some kind of social force in place to balance or guide them. Someone must be there to consider the long-term effects of what they are doing. There was a time when this was done largely through politics. In the modern world, however, that role seems empty.

Part Two: Strongmen

Today there is a widespread notion that politicians are some combination of dishonest, self-interested and incompetent. There are certainly reasons to believe this. From the Capitol storming to accusations against of sexual misconduct against Governor Andrew Cuomo, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that government is incompetent and politicians are malicious. An

OECD report found around three quarters of Americans believe that corruption in government is widespread (35). Sixty-three percent of Americans say they have low or very low trust in members of congress, making it the lowest rated profession of those tracked, according to Gallup polling. In the face of this, there are those who claim to stand outside of institutions and deal with the corruption and incompetence within them. These politicians often promise to do so through undemocratic means, but also have some claim to speak for the people at large. They embody the belief that since all politicians are corrupt and bad, it is better at least for politicians to be bad and corrupt for the people. In general, this tendency is culturally right wing, and more common in the Republican Party.

The Interpreter

Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton came as a shock to almost everyone, and it was a victory for his interpretative style of politics. In his book *Fire and Fury*, Micheal Wolff claimed that Donald Trump assured his wife that there was no way he could win. This seems a bit odd. It is not as if he was somehow cajoled or deceived into running for president. Wolff suggested in his book that the Trump campaign was similar to the plot of *The Producers* (15). Essentially, Trump believed he could benefit from becoming almost president, by gaining further media attention which would in turn help his personal brand. This was further substantiated by the fact that many of those on Trump's team, such as Micheal Flynn and Paul Manefort, had serious conflicts of interest that would be disastrous if he were elected (16-17). Nikki Haley was certain that Trump was not going to be a two-term president and sought to become his successor, even before the 2020 election (305). Stephanie Cegielski, communication

director for the Make America Great Again PAC has also stated Trump did not really want to be president (Byrnes).

Trump has always seemed to enjoy the campaign trail more than governing. He outsourced most of the actual work of governing to his cabinet officials (Shafer). Even in the middle of his presidency, Trump would often leave the White House to campaign. He hosted 57 campaign events between his election in 2016 and February 2019. He was also constantly raising money, encouraging his supporters to donate to his reelection fund years before the election began (Levinthal). This permanent campaign seemed to be what Trump enjoyed most. The campaign trail allowed him to interpret the will of the people, as cheering crowds would assure him that his actions and beliefs were widely supported. It appears Trump liked, more than anything else, the feeling of being able to correctly interpret the will of the people.

This interpretation did not make for particularly polite or respectful politics, but it was in some ways very honest. Trump often derided “the swamp,” shorthand for the everyday corrupt establishment of Washington. He embodied this through his brutal and direct honesty. In 2016, he was called out by Clinton during a debate for not paying income tax, he responded by declaring that tax avoidance “makes me smart” (Mangan). He was honest about the financial chicanery he was engaged in to a degree a way few politicians would be. He was honest about the corruption, and his own feelings, never pretending to like anyone and only liking people who liked him.

Embodying the spirit of the people is a very different thing from enacting their will or policies truly meant to help them. Reasoned debate is eschewed, as it is left up to the leader to make decisions about what to do. It is for this reason that Trump was comfortable claiming,

with flimsy evidence, that the 2020 election was stolen (Yen, et al). Before that defeat, the Republican Party was not able to come together to form a clear platform, so it instead endorsed Donald Trump. During the 2016 campaign, Trump frustrated journalists and critics alike by making the campaign less about policy and more about personality and image. For her part, Hillary Clinton accepted these terms. Clinton framed herself as the competent and civil stateswoman in contrast to the brutish and uncivil populist. One campaign ad, which shows a series of teen and pre-teen girls who hear Trump's most crass statements makes this messaging clear. The end of the ad asks “Is this the President we want for our daughters?” (Kirkland). Trump’s political skill was getting enough Americans to answer in the affirmative, on the argument that there was no time for niceties. Things needed to change immediately. Yet what change ought to occur was unclear. There was a general idea to “Make America Great Again” as well as a barrage of anti-immigrant and anti-globalization rhetoric, yet there seemed to be incredibly little which actually was changed by this. He seemed to be more focused on attracting large crowds by mocking his political opponents and taking the most outrageous position he could on most issues. These large crowds were constantly referred to to legitimize him. The lie that he had the largest crowd size at his inauguration makes sense in this framing (Hurtzler). It was required that he not only be popular, but be so popular that he had the largest crowds in history. It was necessary to constantly reinforce the idea that the will of the people was on his side. Again, this conception of authority seems to be at odds, fundamentally, with any kind of democratic deliberative decision making. This kind of authority, which legitimizes the will of a single person, does not have to be based on the will of the crowd, it can also have divine origins.

The Crusader

While it is not a mainstream religion, Scientology still has a following in the tens of thousands. Unlike other religions, such as Christianity or Islam, it has not really had time to become routinized. As a result, it largely remains centered around its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, who still holds near-absolute authority even decades after his death. Scientologists believe that some part of him still lives on. Hubbard's successor, David Miscavige, was able to take control by expelling or demoting anyone close to Hubbard who was not his ally (Reiterman 233). Once all opposition was eliminated Miscavige was able to claim he was the anointed heir to lead the movement (248). No one else had

Despite its young age, Scientology has a complicated creation story centering around beings called Thetans. According to Hubbard, Thetans are the immortal souls of beings killed on Earth 75 million years ago by the space dictator Xenu, who placed hydrogen bombs in volcanoes and detonated them after sending millions of beings to Earth under the pretense of a tax audit (180). The nakedly ridiculous nature of Scientology's belief system is irrelevant, as the goal is less to explain how the world began and more to create a kind of collective myth that everyone in Scientology can buy into and support.

Tom De Vocht, who was in the Church of Scientology for over three decades, later claimed he would make a point of losing whenever he played backgammon with Miscavage. De Vocht would throw the games because Miscavage had a tendency to start hurting people. Even though De Vocht was a close ally and confidant of Miscavage, he had such a temper that even a thirty-year member felt uncomfortable beating him in a board game (Theroux, 0:40:40-0:40:50). This was by no means an isolated incident, and the Church has long been accused of

using “The Hole” as a means of discipline, where Scientologists are forced to live in a small, dark room, and work sometimes ten hours a day for no pay while receiving little food (Reiterman 556). For those without a sense of direction in life, this makes the movement all the more attractive.

It is in this way that Scientology maintains its authority. The abuse within the movement ensures rigid discipline. The group builds a sense of community among members, who then feel unable to leave. Miscavige is able to claim that everything he is doing is the will of Hubbard. There is no room for democracy of any kind, nor for questioning of the leader. Such a view of authority is different from the “embodying the will of the people” previously discussed, as such a conception of authority is about enacting the will of a semi-divine being, rather than embodying the spirit of the people. Scientology also has no clear political implication, beyond a desire to conform to Hubbard’s wishes, demonstrating how strongmen do not necessarily have to be politically right-wing, but are almost always traditionalist in the sense of wanting to maintain and further some hierarchy. Just as the will of the people legitimized Trump, the will of Hubbard legitimized Miscavage. In both cases there is no room for dissent, no room for debate, and no real way for someone to withdraw their consent.

These strongmen are not unique to the present, but they are certainly becoming more common. Whether legitimized by the will of the people or by some divine being, they are always in opposition to democracy or collective decision making. In some ways their vision of the world is more honest, eschewing the tech-guru’s lie of altruism, but this also makes them more willing and flagrant in their suppression of democracy. These strongmen present a challenge to democracy which it has historically not fared well against.

Part Three: A New Kind of Authority

As the previous examples show, the decline of institutions does not mean people have started to act independently, they have instead moved toward supporting charismatic authority. Is there a means of getting around the various issues charismatic authority holds? The aim of the final section of this paper will be to argue in favor of a system of government which does not require authority, and that is more egalitarian, more stable and hopefully more freeing to humanity. People taking an active role in their own governance may be what is needed to deal with the various issues which have been exacerbated by the rise of charismatic authority, most notably climate change.

True, Open Democracy

The average person has remarkably little influence on the day-to-day operations of their government. Politics is almost entirely separate from their will. Perhaps, then, the antidote to the problem of authority is to give more people a greater say in the political process. Hopefully, this would lead to a more meaningful life for the average person, while also leading to a freer society.

There are other reasons to support such a system. As political theorist Hélène Landemore points out in her book *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* the idea of democracy has historically been conceived of in this way. In ancient Athens, 500 citizens were randomly selected to write the law. They would meet on a hill called Pnyx, and deliberate over what the rules ought to be (68). Medieval Iceland followed a similar process: the people would gather in a large field south of the capital, Reykjavík, every summer, and discuss politics (1). The Swiss Confederation had also followed a comparable model of

democracy, with every adult male being invited to various meeting spots to decide on policy (195). The common theme is that decisions must be undertaken only after all of the citizens have been consulted, and deliberation has been conducted.

Having a deliberative process which includes the entire community would no doubt strengthen communal ties. This would be especially true if politics were regarded not as an existential battle for survival, but a process of talking and coming to an agreement. This would no doubt give people a sense of meaning and of being a part of something greater than themselves. Today, politics is so noisy and confusing that most people have either to believe that the fate of everything they hold dear hangs in the balance, or tune it out completely. It is worth noting that none of this means that issues would be less important, but that individuals would not have to resort to such vitriolic and personal attacks if they felt their voices were being heard.

Landemore advocates for a system of drawing lots: randomly selecting a group of citizens to draft legislation on a particular topic, then allowing them to consult experts. The system was used in France to draft climate legislation for parliament to vote on. The process was called the French Great National Debate. Twenty-one citizens assemblies made up of roughly 100 citizens met and came up with a set of policies to deal with climate change (186). The experiment showed that comprehensive legislation which is created through a consensus system is possible, even for a large and relatively diverse country.

That leaves another question, if such a system is so great, why is it not in use already? There are two primary answers to this question. The first is that politicians would rather dislike having to give up their own power, and the second is the widespread belief that the voters are,

for lack of a better word, stupid. While the latter argument sounds cynical at first, there are good reasons to take it seriously. After all, democracy is arguably what got humanity into its current predicament.

In his book *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*, political scientist Byran Caplan makes a strong case against democracy. While a consensus-based model might work fine for small, largely agrarian societies, he argues, the uncomfortable truth is that the modern world is too complex to be managed effectively by random citizens. The technocrats might need to take control for the good of everyone. He points out that on issues such as free trade, voters are continually making the wrong decisions. Caplan is within a liberal tradition, liberal theorists such as John Stuart Mill argued that parliaments and elections existed so that the public could invest experts with the ability to make decisions. John Adams held a similar view: he once wrote in a letter to John Taylor that democracy "has never been and never can be so durable as Aristocracy or Monarchy. But while it lasts it is bloodier than either." As a result, democracy needed to be restrained. The electoral college, appointment of senators, and other anti-democratic checks ensured that political power would primarily be in the hands of those who knew how to use it.

Firstly, this argument seems to be incorrect in the technical sense. While there are relatively few examples to choose from, the examples which can be found of more open, direct democratic systems seem to suggest that "the people" are good at making decisions. Porto Alegre in Brazil has been experimenting with direct democracy, leading to a decrease in corruption. The decisions the people have made also appear to be good ones. Since direct democracy was instituted, Porto Algere has increased spending on housing and public

infrastructure more than fourfold, leading to a decline in the failure rate of new students from 30 percent to 10 percent. The city has massively increased access to public utilities such as water, electricity and roads. It was also the first city in Brazil to make its public transit system wheelchair accessible. The governance of the city is so good, it has been commended by the United Nations (Bruce 66). All of this weakens the argument against democracy on, it does not seem that people really are that stupid. Certainly, further research and experimentation would be useful as this example is by no means conclusive.

When faced with these examples, it is common for those who prefer a republican government, that is not a direct or open Democracy, to point to the proposition system in California, which ensured that Uber drivers and other gig economy workers would not be given certain rights, and before that explicitly rejected same-sex marriage. The unfortunate reality might be that the average person is quite self-interested, and will never be willing to vote for the advancement of others when doing so will inconvenience them.

Taking each of these arguments in turn, Californians only voted against treating gig economy workers as employees after a massive push for it by numerous companies. More than 200 million dollars was spent to convince Californians to vote against it. At the same time, Uber used its app to heavily lobby drivers to come out against the proposition (Conger). The scales were by no means even, and the Uber drivers themselves had relatively little opportunity to make their voice or argument heard. Any system of consensus-based democracy would have to ensure that both sides of an issue were adequately represented.

On the issue of same-sex marriage, public opinion was in California favored it *before* Obergefell v. Hodges, meaning that the court of public opinion was head of the Supreme Court,

at least in California. The 2008 vote against same-sex marriage in California was fairly narrow, at 52 to 48 percent (Nasaw). It is also worth noting that it was individual cities such as San Francisco and Portland who were among the first to recognize same-sex marriage, according to a summary by the Georgetown Law Library. This suggests that municipalities might be the most useful in protecting the rights of minorities. None of this is to suggest, of course, that a more democratic system will always lead to the most progressive decision, but it does seem often to lead to one. At the very least, the California same-sex marriage ban does not in any way prove that progressive court can save people from their own bigotries.

From these examples, it seems that if a community is properly set up and maintained, there is potential for making even better decisions than the elites might do on their own. Reasoned debate is essential, rather than letting the mob do as it wishes or placing absolute trust in some unquestionable leader, people have to do the hard work of politics themselves. Exactly how to set up these communities is a question which ought to be further studied. Landemore advocates an increased use of referenda paired with small citizens assemblies to draft legislation. The reason for this is simple: when everyone has a chance to speak, all perspectives are heard. The consequences of a decision on every member of the community, as well as on the environment, must be carefully weighed in such a circumstance.

Institutional and individual authority can no longer be trusted. It is time for the people to trust themselves, to collectively create their own political institutions and, following Arendt, to think without a banister. For too long, the real work of deliberative politics has been the purview of an educated elite or completely elided by a strongman promising to fix all of the

problems. This is no longer sustainable. It is impossible to really know what sorts of changes a democratic shift will bring in politics and culture, but it is important to try.

Works Cited

"Adam Neumann on the 'We Generation '| WeWork." Performance by Adam Neumann, YouTube, WeWork, 26 Jan. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOb_ogQJWeI.

Adams, John. "Founders Online: From John Adams to John Taylor, 17 December 1814." *Founders Online*, National Archives, 2002, founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-6371.

Arendt, Hannah. "What Is Authority." *Between Past and Future; Six Exercises in Political Thought*, edited by Carl J. Fredrich , The Viking Press, 1961, pp. 91–141.

Beaumont-Thomas, Ben. "Lady Gaga Attacks Trump's 'Grab' Remarks at Joe Biden Rally." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Nov. 2020,

www.theguardian.com/music/2020/nov/03/lady-gaga-attacks-donald-trump-at- joe-biden-rally.

Bologna, Caroline. “California Officials Say Elon Musk Isn't Allowed To Name His Baby X Æ A-12.” *Huffpost.com*, Huffington Post, 7 May 2020, www.huffpost.com/entry/ elon-musk-baby-name-california-not-allowed_l_5eb41bd9c5b652c56473f63b.

Bowles, Nellie. “Unfiltered Fervor: The Rush to Get Off the Water Grid.” *Nytimes.com*, The New York Times, 29 Dec. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/12/29/dining/raw- water-unfiltered.html.

Bruce, Iain, editor. *The Porto Alegre Alternative: Direct Democracy in Action*. Pluto Press, 2004. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183q5dk. Accessed May 2 2021.

Byrnes, Jesse. “Former Super-PAC Strategist: Trump Didn't Want to Be President.” *TheHill*, 29 Mar. 2016, thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/gop-primaries/274529-former- super-pac-strategist-trump-didnt-want-to-be-president.

Caplan, Bryan Douglas. *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*. Princeton University Press, 2008.

Conger, Kate. “Uber and Lyft Drivers in California Will Remain Contractors.” *Nytimes.com*, The New York Times, 4 Nov. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/11/04/ technology/california-uber-lyft-prop-22.html.

Cramer, Shirley, and Beckey Inkster. “#StatusOfMind: Social Media and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing.” *Raspy.org.uk*, Royal Society for Public Health, May 2017, www.rsph.org.uk/static/uploaded/d125b27c-0b62-41c5- a2c0155a8887cd01.pdf.

Dey, Esha. *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 14 Dec. 2020, www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-12/are-tesla-s-shares-worth-90-or-780-wall-street-can-t-decide.

Di Nisio, Andrea, et al. “Endocrine Disruption of Androgenic Activity by Perfluoroalkyl Substances: Clinical and Experimental Evidence .” *Androgenic Activity Perfluoroalkyl Substances*, Endocrine Society, 6 Nov. 2018, www.documentcloud.org/documents/5316830-EDCs-Androgenic-Activity-Perfluoroakyl.html.

Dulffer, Jost. “Bonapartism, Fascism and National Socialism.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1976, pp. 109–128. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/260193. Accessed 31 April 2021.

Fink, Christina. “DANGEROUS SPEECH, ANTI-MUSLIM VIOLENCE, AND FACEBOOK IN MYANMAR.” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 71, no. 1.5, 2018, pp. 43–52. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26508117. Accessed 3 May 2021.

Frier, Sarah. “Zuckerberg Says Facebook Collects Internet Data on Non-Users.” *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 11 Apr. 2018, www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/ 2018-04-11/zuckerberg-says-facebook-collects-internet-data-on-non-users.

Gallup. “Honesty/Ethics in Professions.” *Gallup.com*, Gallup, 3 Feb. 2021, news.gallup.com/poll/1654/honesty-ethics-professions.aspx.

Georgetown Law Library . “A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: A Timeline of the Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S.” *A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States*, 12 Apr. 2021, guides.ll.georgetown.edu/c.php? g=592919&p=4182201.

Hagai Levine, Niels Jørgensen, Anderson Martino-Andrade, Jaimev Mendiola, Dan Weksler-Derri, Irina Mindlis, Rachel Pinotti, Shanna H Swan, Temporal trends in sperm count: a systematic review and meta-regression analysis, *Human Reproduction Update*, Volume 23, Issue 6, November-December 2017, Pages 646–659, https://doi.org/10.1093/humupd/dmx022

Hawkins, Andrew J. "Elon Musk, Lover of Dumb Jokes, Says He's Slashing Tesla Model S Price to $69,420." *Theverge.com*, The Verge, 14 Oct. 2020 www.theverge.com/2020/10/14/21516528/elon-musk-tesla-model-s-price-cut- twitter.

Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *One Nation, Two Cultures* . Alfred A. Knop, 1999.

Hope Yen, Ali Swenson. "AP FACT CHECK: Trump's Claims of Vote Rigging Are All Wrong." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 3 Dec. 2020, apnews.com/article/ election-2020-ap-fact-check-joe-biden-donald-trump- technology-49a24edd6d10888dbad61689c24b05a5.

Hutzler, Alexandra. "Nearly Two Years into His Presidency, Donald Trump Is Still Seriously Overestimating His Crowd Sizes." *Newsweek.com*, Newsweek, 23 Oct. 2018, www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-lying-crowd-sizes-rally-1183076.

Igielnik, Ruth. "70% Of Americans Say U.S. Economic System Unfairly Favors the Powerful." *Pewresearch.org*, Pew Research Center, 28 July 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/09/70-of-americans-say-u-s-economic- system-unfairly-favors-the-powerful/.

Kirkland, Allegra. "'Fat Ugly Face,' Other Trump Insults About Women Highlighted In Clinton Ad (VIDEO)." *Talking Points Memo*, 23 Sept. 2016, talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/clinton-ad-mirrors-trump-comments-women.

Klein, Ezra. *Why We're Polarized* . Avid Reader Press, 2020.

Landemore, Hélène. *Open Democracy Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton University Press, 2020.

Levinthal, Dave. “Donald Trump Created a Permanent Presidential Campaign. Here's How.” *Center for Public Integrity*, 18 Feb. 2019, publicintegrity.org/politics/donald- trump-president-campaign-money-fundraising/.

Lydic, Desi, and Mukhade Singh. “A Deep Dive into the ‘Raw Water ’Craze | The Daily Show.” *YouTube.com*, The Daily Show , 23 Apr. 2018, www.nytimes.com/ 2017/12/29/dining/raw-water-unfiltered.html. Accessed 6 May 2021.

Mangan, Dan. “Joe Biden Debuts His First Nickname for Donald Trump.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 19 May 2020, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/joe-biden-donald-trump-nickname-2020-election-president-tweety-a9522261.html.

McCarthy, Justin. “Americans' Confidence in Banks Still Languishing Below 30%.” *Gallup.com*, Gallup, 28 Mar. 2021, news.gallup.com/poll/192719/americans- confidence-banks-languishing-below.aspx

McFarland, Matt. “Elon Musk Sets Bold Goals. But Has He Delivered?” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 2 May 2019, www.cnn.com/2019/05/02/tech/elon-musk- predictions.

Mill, John Stuart. “Representative Government.” *Social Sciences.mcmaster.ca*, Batoche Books, 2001, socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/mill/repgovt.pdf.

Mosher, Dave. “Elon Musk: We Need to Leave Earth as Soon as Possible.” *Businessinsider.com*, Business Insider, 10 Oct. 2015, www.businessinsider.com/ elon-musk-mars-colonies-human-survival-2015-10.

Nasaw, Daniel. “US Election: California Approves Ban on Same-Sex Marriage as States Vote on Abortion, Marijuana, Assisted Suicide and Other Initiatives.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 Nov. 2008, www.theguardian.com/world/ 2008/nov/05/uselections2008-gayrights-california-proposition-8.

Nuemann, Adam, and Thomas W Farley. “ECNY Events Adam Neumann.” *YouTube.com*, Billionaire's Insight Row, 4 June 2020, www.youtube.com/watch? v=yOb_ogQJWeI. Accessed 31 April 2021.

Osnos, Evan. “Can Mark Zuckerberg Fix Facebook Before It Breaks Democracy?” *The New Yorker*, 10 Sept. 2018, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/17/can- mark-zuckerberg-fix-facebook-before-it-breaks-democracy.

OECD. “Trust in government, policy effectiveness and the government agenda” in *Government at a Glance 2013* OECD Publishing https://doi.org/10.1787/ gov_glance-2013-6-en

Rainie, Lee, et al. “Americans' Trust in Government, Each Other, Leaders.” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, Pew Research Center, 18 Sept. 2020, www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/.

Regalado, Antonio. “Elon Musk's Neuralink Is Neuroscience Theater.” *Technologyreview.com*, MIT Technology Review, 30 Aug. 2020, www.technologyreview.com/2020/08/30/1007786/elon-musks-neuralink-demo-update-neuroscience-theater/.

Reitman, Janet. *Inside Scientology: the Story of America's Most Secretive Religion*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

Shafer, Jack. “Trump Doesn't Want to Be President.” *POLITICO Magazine*, 22 June 2017, www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/22/trump-doesnt-want-to-be- president-215292.

Strauss, Neil. “Elon Musk: The Architect of Tomorrow.” *Rollingstone.com*, Rolling Stone, 29 July 2020, www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/elon-musk-the- architect-of-tomorrow-120850/.

Swendroe, Larry. “Financial Implications Of Robinhood Investors.” *SeekingAlpha*, 2021, seekingalpha.com/article/4407850-financial-implications-of-robinhood-investors.

The Economist Intelligence Unit. “Democracy Index 2020 In Sickness and in Health?” *EIU.com*, The Economist, 2021, pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf?mkt_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAF9KW_znhAdi9UKfpdnw2HB8VQuxeYIjmrdxQNiDpLtjubiJk16HwMY8O-khl9dTyAvmesMADMxsayONZppL9Dj9K-_8p-IO-XCcp4mX9WmB0_sHw.

Trainer, Ian. “Swiss Vote to Ban Construction of Minarets on Mosques.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 29 Nov. 2009, www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/29/switzerland-bans-mosque-minarets.

Tucker, Catherine E. “Social Networks, Personalized Advertising, and Privacy Controls.” *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2014, pp. 546–562., www.jstor.org/stable/43832316. Accessed 29 March 2021.

"Values." *Commitment to People + Planet*, Alive Water, alivewaters.com/pages/ commitment-to-people-planet.

Wolff, Micheal. *Fire and Fury*. Henry Holt and Company, 2018.