



Self-Governance After Representation: The Anthropocene and the Politicisation of Everyday Life

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy ‘after representation’ is at the centre of discussions of how understandings of political and societal processes need to be reimagined in the Anthropocene.¹ Anthropocene approaches, which highlight the importance of multiple worlds, unintended consequences and the non-linearity of causal effects, suggest that the liberal modernist framing of the state as a monolithic or homogenous actor ruling over and representing a collective public of citizens no longer operates, at either the

¹ Democracy ‘after representation’ describes a broad range of approaches which highlight the limits of formally constituted political power to shape or wield control over the complexity of social interaction. The modernist construction of politics as separate to or as dominant over the social and economic is questioned and the effects of power are understood as contingent, problematic or counter to the intent of ruling elites (see, for example, Giddens 1994; Richards 2000; Beck 2005; Latour 2007; Mitchell 2009; Connolly 2011).

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level of ontological description or of normative legitimisation, in today's polity (Dryzek and Pickering 2019; Mert 2019). As debates about the rise of neoliberal discourse (Harvey 2005; Crouch 2011) or the end of "Left and Right" (Giddens 1994; Beck 1997), or globalisation and complexity (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992; Cerny 2010) have already testified, there is a growing disconnection between the liberal understanding of the formal constitutive power of the public, through the process of representation, and the multiple, fragmented and distributed informal or social constitutively generative power of the public as it is practised and conceived in excess of the limits and constraints of the formal representative sphere (Hardt and Negri 2006; Virno 2004).

This "performative excess" of the public (Pickering 2025) is the result of a relational or process understanding that 'everyday' decisions made in the personal and social sphere have long-term and unintended consequences, including (and moving beyond) environmental impacts. It is increasingly held that, in the non-linear world of the Anthropocene, the public must be understood as world-making in an everyday sense, through quotidian decision-making and social interaction (Dryzek and Pickering 2019; Mert 2019). The democratic state thereby no longer stands above or separate to society but works to facilitate a more responsible or reflexive operation of plural and differentiated private judgements (see, for example, Giddens 1994; Beck 1997; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Lash 2002; Latour 2004; Dallmayr 2010; Connolly 2011). This chapter seeks to draw out how both the processes and meanings of self-government and the space(s) in which it is held to operate have been transformed and pluralised in the Anthropocene. In this discussion, the limits of democratic will formation no longer constrain the growth of self-governance but rather facilitate it, extending 'democracy' into the 'everyday' and the 'politics' of 'life' itself (see further, Michel Foucault's juxtaposition of sovereign power vis-a-vis biopower; Foucault 1981, 135–145; see also Foucault 2003, 239–263; 2008).

The analytical framing of post-representational approaches, bringing 'self-governance' down to the level of everyday life, will be heuristically drawn out through engaging with their first major treatments in critical liberal theorising, in the work of John Dewey and Friedrich von Hayek. These two authors are leading theorists of democracy and complexity and are enjoying a revival of interest today, for precisely this reason

(see also Chapter 6).² The conceptualisation of the democratisation of ‘everyday life’ assumes that political subjects are embedded in differentiated, plural and overlapping social and cognitive communities. It is important that in this framing, the social sphere is understood as distinct both from the contractual relations of the market and from the formal public sphere. This is illustrated clearly in Robin Wall Kimmerer’s critical engagement with the reductionism of modernist thought, in particularly the limits of the social contract framing of responsible citizenship as transactional. Here, shopping in the supermarket for mass produced and plastic-packaged chicken appears to be a free consumer choice, but this ignores all the social, economic and environmental consequences which are not just factored out of the decision but fundamentally disavowed. As she states:

We have constructed an artifice, a Potemkin village of an ecosystem where we perpetrate the illusion that the things we consume have just fallen off the back of Santa’s sleigh, not been ripped from the earth. The illusion enables us to imagine that the only choices we have are between brands. (Wall Kimmerer 2013, 199)

In contrast, to this modernist approach, described by Martin Heidegger as “enframing”, understanding nature as a “standing reserve” available for endless instrumentalisation and extraction, and as of value only in so far as it enables modernist developmental progress (cited in Pickering 2025). Wall Kimmerer (2013) suggests a responsible and relational citizenship that works “with” nature rather than “on” it. A citizenship attuned to relational feedbacks about our impact on others and upon the environment, rather than being closed off to our relations by narrow and reductionist economic and political contractual arrangements (see Chapter 13).

In presenting environmental, economic and political problems as products of ‘personal’ or social decisions, leading Foucauldian sociologists, Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, have noted that individuals in this view are governed “neither as isolated atoms of classical political economy”—i.e. as

² On von Hayek (see, for example, Pennington 2003; Greenwood 2010). Dewey is explicitly drawn upon today by authors seeking to question liberal assumptions about the division between politics and economics and drawing upon ‘new materialist’ framings, Science and Technology Studies (STS) and actor-network theory (ANT) (see, for example, Marres 2005; Latour 2007, 162; Bennett 2010, 100–104).

interest-bearing subjects—“nor as citizens of society”—as rights-bearing subjects—“but as members of heterogeneous communities of allegiance, as community emerges as a new way of conceptualising and administering moral relations among persons” (Miller and Rose 2008, 25). In this framing, self-governance can be promulgated without the abstract assumptions of universality, rationality and autonomy presumed in the discourses of modern liberalism. Miller and Rose (2008, 213) articulate the Anthropocene problematic, with regard to the “new specification of the subject of government”, thus:

Within this new regime of the actively responsible self, individuals are to fulfil their national obligations not through their relations of dependency and obligation to one another, but through seeking to fulfil themselves within a variety of micro-moral domains or ‘communities’ – families, workplaces, schools, leisure associations, neighbourhoods. Hence the problem is to find the means by which individuals may be made responsible through their individual choices for themselves and those to whom they owe allegiance, through the shaping of a lifestyle according to grammars of living that are widely disseminated, yet do not depend upon political calculations and strategies for their rationales or for their techniques. (Miller and Rose 2008, 214)

Miller and Rose (2008, 215) are entirely correct in noting that this “ethical a priori of active citizens in an active society is perhaps the most fundamental, and most generalizable, characteristic of these new rationalities of government”. Mitchell Dean concurs that the task of government today lies precisely in the management and regulation of, or inculcation of, the agency of the governed. The solution to problems of society, whether in the form of welfare, crime or conflict becomes then not that of liberal forms of state intervention but of the development of societal agency:

Victims of crime, smokers, abused children, gay men, intravenous drug users, the unemployed, indigenous people and so on are all subject to these technologies of agency, the object being to transform their status, to make them active citizens capable, as individuals and communities, of managing their own risk. (Dean 2010, 196–197)

In a complex and entangled world, the modern state does not withdraw from society and leave rational and autonomous subjects to their

own devices; rather, it appears as an active and facilitating state—acting from below as enabler and facilitator, rather than from above, or a gardener (see Chapter 20) or a forester (Chapter 13). As Dean (2010, 197) states, once problematised: “Individuals are required to agree to a range of normalizing, therapeutic and training measures designed to empower them, enhance their self-esteem, optimize their skills and entrepreneurship and so on”. In fine, self-governance is no longer about choice-making in the abstract but rather the capacity to make choices in line with the responsibilities of entanglement, of accounting for outcomes in terms of community responsibilities, determined via an awareness of feedback effects. Good citizens, self-governing citizens are thereby those ‘sensitised’ and ‘attuned’ to their environments (Chandler 2020).

This chapter attempts to demarcate the conceptual distinctions at play in Anthropocene approaches to democracy as ‘self-governance’ after representation, first, by highlighting the movement beyond the separation between the public and the private sphere which has been crucial to liberal modernist frameworks. The following sections then consider the development of non-linear analytical framings more suited to the Anthropocene. It is suggested that non-linear approaches and the shift in understanding of the role and location of the public are then formulated in analogous ways both by the pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, and the neoliberal theorist, Friedrich von Hayek. A focus on these two thinkers highlights that Anthropocene approaches to democracy, relational, processual understandings of self-governance and entangled processes of becoming, are not novel per se. Rather, the point is that these, previously marginal approaches, sceptical of liberal ontological assumptions, have now become mainstreamed today. In this framework, self-governance no longer operates through the constitution of a formal public sphere but rather through the facilitation of private choice-making and personal and community modes of self-government on an ‘everyday’ level (Grist 2009, 16; Big Society 2012).

DEMOCRATIC REASON

From Rousseau onwards, the ‘general will’ was seen to be capable of emerging above corrupting private interests on the basis of the formal constitution of a public as the source of political legitimacy (Rousseau 1998). The collective will could only emerge as a product of the exercise of public reasoning, through free and active engagement in discussion and

debate in the public sphere (Kant 1991). The Enlightenment drew heavily upon classical understandings of the constitution of a democratic collective will through public political discourse, whereby citizens had not just a right but a duty of participation. It was the public sphere of the assembly “in which the free existence of a free citizen manifested itself” (Foucault 2011, 34). The outcome of deliberation would only be based on persuasion, not on obligation or coercion between unequals, constructing a “circular relation” between public reason and democracy (Foucault 2010, 155; see also Arendt 1998; Samons 2004). Today, few theorists maintain the importance of such a division, understanding a formal realm of democratic discourse as artificially separated from private interests operating in the societal sphere of interaction, although this legacy can be seen in Habermasian theories of dialogic reasoning and communicative rationality (Habermas 1986; see also Disch 1997, 152) and in deliberative approaches (Elster 1998; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Fishkin 2011; Dryzek 2012).

It is important to emphasise that the critique of the formation of a democratic will is today not couched in conservative or elitist terms, as a critique of democracy, but in support of the extension of democracy to the social sphere through the inculcation of personal reflexivity. The discourse of non-linearity thereby moves beyond the Platonic “reversal”, which forms the basis of traditional conservative thought, suggesting that democracy would merely result in mob rule and the corruption of power (Plato 2007; see also Foucault 2010, 224; 2011, 61). It also moves beyond the “Aristotelian hesitation”, whereby democracy was defended not on the basis of the constitution of a collective will but on the basis of limiting and altering power and thereby negatively restraining private interests (Aristotle 1992; Foucault 2011, 46).

The legacy of Aristotelian approaches to democracy can be seen today, for example, in John Keane’s conception of “monitory democracy”. Here, the role of citizens is not that of public decision-making but of maintaining checks on executive rule, with the use of new communication technologies enabling citizens “in big and complex societies” to scrutinise the workings of power (Keane 2011, 214; see also Keane 2009). Keane argues that democracy today cannot be based on “heading backwards” to the Greeks, “to recapture the (imagined) spirit of assembly-based democracy—‘power to the people’” (Keane 2011, 219). He criticises contemporary advocates of “deep” or “direct” democracy, like Fung and Wright (2003), who argue that what counts is “the commitment

and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and empowered because they attempt to tie action to discussion” (Keane 2011, 219).

As will be analysed below, for Anthropocene approaches to democracy, representation and the control over government are no longer the central concern—rather, it is social processes and interactions that are at the centre of analysis. In the sections which follow, emphasis will be placed on the development of today’s democratic understandings of the need for a reflexive citizenry; locating the power of self-government not in the formal public sphere but in the social sphere. Crucial to this analytical framing is the scepticism of universal, reductive, linear reasoning which centres representation, found in both the pragmatic approach of John Dewey and the neoliberal approach of Friedrich von Hayek. Both these understandings challenge core representational assumptions of liberal democratic theory, which as Koopman (2009) notes, even today, “is still excessively enamoured of state-based rationality”. Even state-based controls, such as those seen during the COVID-19 crisis, tended to reinforce the citizen-centred demand for responsible behaviour, placing the duties of entanglement over those of abstract autonomy and freedom (for a good example of this reasoning, see Bratton 2021b).

DEWEY, VON HAYEK AND NON-LINEAR REASONING

Both Dewey and von Hayek are understood to be liberal thinkers, usually construed as being from very different (if not opposite) ends of the liberal spectrum—one a progressive anti-market educationalist, the other a neoliberal free market advocate, until recently neglected by left-leaning democratic theorists (see Gamble 1996)—however, more recent work has highlighted shared aspects between the two thinkers (for example, Mulligan 2006; Ralston 2012) and Colin Koopman (2009) has explicitly argued that now “the time is ripe for Deweyans to take another look at Hayek”. Both Dewey and von Hayek were strongly influenced by Darwinist understandings and were resolute in their hostility to behaviourist approaches (Hodgson 2006). Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection was understood to fundamentally challenge religious ideas of the uniqueness of man (the human/nature divide) and the Cartesian dualism of thought and being (see the excellent treatment in Rogers 2012).

The point that this short engagement with these thinkers seeks to highlight is that relational, processual understandings of self-governance as responsive to feedback effects and entangled processes of becoming are not novel for the Anthropocene but become mainstreamed today (see also Chapters 12 and 13 for critiques or Chapters 2, 15, 17, and 18 for affirmative accounts of these motives in Anthropocene debates). The roots of this thinking are to be found in earlier problematisations of the abstract universalising assumptions central to a liberal political ontology. Dewey was particularly forward-looking in his critique of the liberal “individualistic” mythology of man as an autonomous rational subject, which he saw as a contingent and post hoc justification for the American and French Revolutions, dependent on Newtonian metaphysics and its import into economic laissez-faire understandings (Dewey 1927, 84–92; see also Dewey 2008). As Dewey (1927, 25) wrote:

[S]ingular beings in their singularity think, want and decide, what they think and strive for, the content of their beliefs and intentions is a subject-matter provided by association. Thus man is not merely de facto associated, but he becomes a social animal in the make-up of his ideas, sentiments and deliberate behavior. What he believes, hopes for and aims at is the outcome of association and intercourse.

Although von Hayek was often mistakenly understood to be an advocate of rationalist individualism, his advocacy of the free market was not based upon the reasoning autonomy of the subject but, in fact, upon a critique of the classical rationalist assumptions of *homo economicus*. For von Hayek, like Dewey, human reasoning was merely a phenomenological product of “interpretations” based upon inherited and learned experiences that mediated between the experience and the response. For von Hayek (1952, 44): “we cannot hope to account for observed behaviour without reconstructing the ‘intervening processes in the brain’”. von Hayek turned to psychology to explain how internal differentiations facilitated varying responses to events or crises, particularly to those that were unfamiliar or unexpected. According to von Hayek, brains were complex, integrated networks but they were also malleable and capable of adaptive change, depending upon the extent to which “phylogenetic”, inherited patterns and connections, and “ontogenetic” aspects, acquired by the individual during the course of their lifetime, interacted (von Hayek 1952, 80–81).

von Hayek's work on the psychology of the brain focused on how human responses were shaped through resilience and adaption, in ways that were little different to any other living organism:

The continued existence of those complex structures which we call organisms is made possible by their capacity of responding to certain external influences by such changes in their structure or activity as are required to maintain or restore the balance necessary for their persistence. (von Hayek 1952, 82)

Individuals, especially more complex organisms like humans, would respond differently to external stimuli in ways that enabled them to react differently. Often these reflexive differences would not be intentional but arbitrary or accidental. The key point for von Hayek was that differential experiences and reactions necessarily resulted from the innate practical experiential differences of individuals and the complex interaction between their "milieu interieur" (internal, mental environment) and their external, societal environments (von Hayek 1952, 109). This evolutionary or emergent understanding of reflexive subjectivity was to map well onto current understandings of the problem of governing complexity (see further, Chandler 2013).

Hayekian and Deweyan perspectives understood reasoning and intentionality as neither existing independently of, nor prior to, social engagement but as emerging through inherited and social structures: reason thereby developed adaptively. Instead of understanding reason as a reflection or representation of reality in thought, Dewey (2007, 21) argued that reasoning was a product of the ongoing practical interaction of subjects with their environment. Reasoning was therefore not "deliberative" or "rationalist" but an acquired capacity to respond and to adapt to the world. For von Hayek, too, it was implicit or tacit knowledge, which was key to reflexivity and to the construction of decentralised and efficient complex orders (Ralston 2012). For both authors, there were no dualist understandings of subject-object relations at either the individual or state level. Neither individuals nor states were seen to be autonomous goal or target-setters, engaged in means-ends instrumentalism. Both therefore argued against foundationalist understandings and understood democracy as a process of societal experimentation and adaptive learning and self-government.

The two key aspects of this anti-rationalist understanding (drawn out well in Koopman 2009) are those of process and plurality. There was no single universal or rational order: neither that constituted by the objective structures of the world (which we can only partially perceive through our limited practical experiences and desires), nor that imposed by some Cartesian rationality (as our subjective understandings and desires are similarly shaped by our societal associations, customs and habits). Reason was thereby an evolutionary process of plural experiences and understandings: reason, like society, was a self-organising and emergent social product. There was no possibility of going beyond this to some monistic view of knowledge, somehow standing outside and independently of our social attachments. The human world was one of complex social interactions with contingent and emergent outcomes beyond human reasoning or control from above.

For von Hayek, the most adapted and complex social, legal and political institutions resulted from human action not from human design: they were self-organised or emergent. These societal institutions therefore were not established on the basis of instrumental rationalism and lacked any ultimate end or purpose; evolving through social practice as a framework of often tacit rules and customary norms, shaping the citizens' habitual and unreflective practices. Of course, for von Hayek, the most important of these institutions was the market, which, following Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', was held to regulate the complex transactions of society much more efficiently than any government could do through planning. The operation of the market—as allocator of goods and services and the provider of symbolic guides (prices) for decision-making—was seen to be the key institution through which individuals were able to make executive decisions and choices and through this to constitute an emergent institutional order.

Of course, it could be argued that von Hayek (1991) overstated the divide between the rationality of the market and the irrational "fatal conceit" of government regulation. However, the alternative to the failings of market rationality from the Deweyan pragmatist perspective would not be that of state intervention, but the highlighting that market rationality is itself determined by society's democratic ethical commitments. As Koopman (2009) argues, through democratic ethical reasoning, society could ensure that markets worked more efficiently, for example, through ethical consumption raising the demand for organic, locally-sourced, labour-friendly, fair-trade products. The critique of market rationality did

not necessarily lead to a state-based solution but, logically, to a society-based solution. For Dewey, as for von Hayek, states with their means–ends considerations and limited knowledge were powerless before the real sphere of democratic reason: society. It is increasingly from within this framework of social, inter-subjective, moral and ethical development, that self-governance is understood to be furthered today.

AFTER REPRESENTATION

Dewey and von Hayek both prefigured the politics of entangled responsibilities of the Anthropocene (Wright 2014; see also Chapter 12) through their emphasis on societal interaction and the process of reflexive decision-making in the ‘everyday’. It is important to highlight that the critique of political rationalism inevitably meant that the political subject was embodied in social and environmental attachments and it is at this level that democratic reflexivity needs to operate: upon democracy as an ethic or way of life. Democracy cannot be a product of rationalist deliberation as if thought was somehow distinct from practice, if it is to mean anything it has to enable society to be responsive to contingencies arising from human association. Both Dewey and von Hayek speak to us today because of the different register of their sensitivity to the problems of politics. These are not those of individual or collective rights or of needs and desires, as in rationalist discourses, but the unintended problems of association (which differ according to the complexity of each society across time and space) (Dewey 1927, 33). This associational power is self-generated, emergent, unintended and unknown except for its consequences, which can be traced back and understood via sensitivity to feedback effects (Dewey 1927, 32, 106).

The problems for both thinkers did not involve the formal politics of representation but the social understandings and reflexivity elicited from the need to trace the contingent and unintentional effects of association. The problem was one of emergent social reasoning not rationalist ‘political’ reasoning. Politics was therefore a process of responding to concerns regarding these externalities, which constituted pluralist publics with a stake in their resolution (Dewey 1927, 73). This complexity, driven by technological change, was described well by Dewey (1927, 126):

Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence having a common interest

in controlling these consequences. But the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, they have formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself.

In fine, the Anthropocene becomes clear, as a problem for representation, when we read Dewey, like Giddens (2002), describing a “runaway world”, whereby “man has suffered the impact of an enormously enlarged control of physical energies without any corresponding ability to control himself and his own affairs” (Dewey 1927, 175). Once this control could no longer be regained through the construction of a state-based deliberative public, the only solution was that of the construction of a pluralised public, reflexive about its associative connections and “responsive to the complex and world-wide scene in which it is enmeshed” (Dewey 1927, 216). This public was not formally politically constituted and thus operated on both local and global levels—“while local, it will not be isolated” (Dewey 1927, 216). The solution to the runaway world of extended associational powers was not that of state regulation or formal representation, but that of developing interactive social responsibilities. If anything, Dewey could be read as arguing that the separation of the public sphere from the social one was the key barrier to unleashing social reasoning—the real intelligence which was already embedded in social interaction and could not be articulated as long as it was forced to take artificial political forms. Social interactive ties made conscious and reflective could then provide real democratic reasoning (Dewey 1927, 219). It is here that the “life politics” of Giddens (1994) and Beck (1997) or the actor-network theorising of Latour (2007) can be seen to provide models for adaptive resilience as a framework for self-governing in the non-linear world of the Anthropocene.

For both Dewey and von Hayek, the sphere of reason was not located in the artificial public realm of government and representation but in the private and informal realm of societal interaction. Yet neither of these thinkers advocated the freedom of the private and informal realm on the basis of reason as rationalist knowledge but rather on the basis of the contingency of understanding and the need to inculcate adaptive learning. Both considered how adaptive learning could be facilitated by governing institutions, rather than considering the state as an executive, decision-making actor. For Dewey (1927, 54–55), “the regulations and laws of

the state are [...] misconceived when they are viewed as commands” as if the state directly represented the Rousseauian ‘general will’, there was no politically-constituted subject capable of directing and controlling society:

Rules of law are in fact the institutions of conditions under which persons make their arrangements with one another. They are the structures which canalize action; they are active forces only as are the banks which confine the flow of a stream, and are commands only in the sense in which banks command the current. (Dewey 1927, 54)

Dewey and von Hayek (1960) both understood the modern state to be an enabling state rather than a directing or decision-making state, through the preference for constitutive rules rather than regulatory ones (Dewey 1927, 54; von Hayek 1982, 169–195; see also Rawls 1955; Searle 1969). What the state enabled was social reasoning as relational and processual reasoning, reasoning that was not abstracted from the context of world-making but entangled, attuned, responsive to this world in its becoming, in ‘a dance’ (or, better, “a spiral”, Pickering 2025) of shared agency: this was the true mode of self-governing reason. In this emergent and evolutionary understanding, states played a role analogous to that of custom or habit, providing the framework for decision-making in the informal, private, sphere but not dictating it, enabling social experimentation and adaptation to take place in the social sphere. The meaning of democracy was transformed from the representation and contestation of views and preferences in the deliberative public sphere to self-governance as a mode of relational being, a mode of living: democracy as adaptive learning in the societal sphere (see also Chapter 13).

It is important to register clearly the consequences of this shift from formal institutional understandings of self-government to processual and relational framings of self-governance. This distinction was emphasised by Arturo Escobar (2017, 171) in *Designs for the Pluriverse*: “Autopoiesis names a type of self-creation that is anything but autonomous in the modernist sense; it is not about self-sufficiency”, but relational preparedness. Self-governance, understood as the inculcation of the necessary relational capacities and sensitivities to others with whom we share our environments is not about autonomy in the sense of liberal democratic ‘freedoms’. In place of rationalist ‘freedoms’ are relational ‘responsibilities’. This means, as Escobar (2017, 172) states, that “the call for autonomy involves not only a critique of formal democracy but an attempt

to construct an altogether different form of rule". For Benjamin Bratton (2021a, 103), this different form of rule can be understood through contraposing "the ethics of being an object" to those of being a subject: "a shift in ethics from a position that calibrates subjective moral will to one that recognizes one's self and body as an object in a cause-and-effect relationship with the world". It is not our subjective intentions that count but our embodied and objective relational effects which stretch well beyond (and sometimes have very different consequences to) our intentionality.

CONCLUSION

The work of Dewey and von Hayek prefigured our post-2000s understandings of how politics and democracy needed to be reworked to confront the problems of the Anthropocene, after the perceived decline of the linear politics of Left and Right, which had shaped liberal Modernity since the French Revolution. What is particularly important to note is that, in post-representational understandings of the Anthropocene, power is located not at the level of the state but at the level of society itself. It is this shift that enables a new type of political solution to problems; not addressed to the question of institutional mechanisms of representation at the state-level but to problems as they are democratically reframed at the societal level, as self-governance from below.

In more classical liberal modern accounts, institutional changes were envisaged, or the public were to be educated or empowered, in order for the mechanisms of representation to work more efficiently; for the liberal promise of government as representing the 'will of the people' to be reaffirmed. As long as we lived in the world of political contestation—of Left and Right—with state power at the centre of political life and contested by (at least two) rival ideological understandings, given shape and coherence by political party organisation and social contestation, the problem of representation was at the centre of democratic theorising. Today, in the age of the Anthropocene, we no longer live in such a world, and with the decline of state-based understandings of politics we have seen a revival of evolutionary, emergent and non-linear understandings of politics, which no longer have the problematic of representation at their heart. When government authorities and policy think-tanks talk of giving 'power to the people' today, they do not necessarily discuss ways of developing more efficient mechanisms of representation.

Democratic politics in the age of the Anthropocene is less concerned with representation than with the development of social reasoning, sensitivity and attunement to entangled relations. The ‘power’ which ‘the people’ are seen to require today is that of social empowerment: the power to take reasoned and responsive decisions in their everyday lives. This capacity to think responsively in a world of change and of complexity is the power of resilience understood as the capacity for self-governance. In this framing, there is no limit to the extension of democracy through social capacity-building, the ‘powering’ of communities or the empowerment of decision-making individuals. Once the problematic of constituting the public will is seen to be the responsibility of the pluralised public itself, in its continual emergence, we are all enjoined to the democratic task of working on becoming sensitive to feedback effects and reflecting upon our own attachments and responsibilities to those around us. The personal is indeed political, once democracy is freed from its formal bounds of representation.

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