

The Possibility of Democratic Autonomy

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Abstract. What makes democracy valuable? One traditional answer holds that participating in democratic self-government amounts to a kind of autonomy: it enables citizens to be the authors of their political affairs. Many contemporary philosophers, however, are skeptical. We are autonomous, they argue, when important features of our lives are up to us, but in a democracy we merely have a say in a process of collective choice. In this paper, we defend the possibility of democratic autonomy, by advancing a conception of it which is impervious to this objection. At the core of our account is the idea of joint authorship. You are a joint author of something when that thing expresses your joint intentions. Democracy may not make any one of us sole author of our political affairs, but it can make us their joint authors. It is in such joint authorship, we claim, that the intrinsic value of democratic self-government consists.

1. Introduction

What makes democracy valuable? For one thing, democratic institutions are widely thought to have good causal consequences. Perhaps they forestall famine¹, promote peace², generate growth³; perhaps democratic regimes tend to respect the rights of their citizens—more reliably than non-democratic regimes do, at any rate.⁴ Yet democracy's value cannot be exhausted by these instrumental benefits, because, clichéd as they may be, it is easy to imagine cases where autocracy has better consequences than democracy. Imagine being ruled by a competent and benevolent dictator. They might forestall famine, promote peace, generate growth. They might assiduously respect their citizens' rights. Yet, however good the consequences of the dictator's rule, it seems that such a society would be missing out on something in not being governed democratically. If we take this intuition at face value—and why shouldn't we?—we must conclude that democracy is intrinsically valuable.⁵

What, then, makes democracy intrinsically valuable? We can begin to answer this question by noting that democracy has two distinguishing features: in a democracy people govern themselves together—either directly or through their representatives—and they do so as political equals. As an initial hypothesis, it seems plausible that *both* of these features are valuable. If that's right, then a full explanation of democracy's value needs to account for both. An attractive approach to doing so—one with deep historical resonance⁶—appeals to the intersection of two broader values: equality and autonomy. The importance of political equality can be explained as a special case of

¹ As Sen (1982) famously claimed. For criticism, see Rubin (2009).

² This claim comes from Kant (1795). For a review of the contemporary literature, see Hayes (2011).

³ As Acemoglu *et al* (2020) have recently claimed. But see Pozuelo, Slipowitz and Vuletin (2016) for a contrary view.

⁴ For this claim, see Davenport (2007). For a skeptical view, see Hill (2016).

⁵ As we'll use the term, 'intrinsic value' just means value irreducible to causal effects. We do not mean that the value depends exclusively on a thing's intrinsic properties. *Pace* Korsgaard (1983), we take this to be in line with common philosophical usage. Note that our definition of intrinsic value is compatible with the item in question being intrinsically valuable in virtue of (partly) constituting something else of intrinsic value.

⁶ Most famously, this was Rousseau's view in *The Social Contract*. He took (legislative) democracy to be the only system where citizens could enjoy both equal political standing and 'moral freedom.' For a more recent discussions of the view that the justification of democracy appeals to both freedom and equality, see Richardson (2002, 24–25).

a broader egalitarian ideal. The importance of collective self-government can be explained as a special case of a broader ideal of autonomy. Together, equality and autonomy explain the value of governing ourselves together as equals: that is, of governing ourselves democratically.

In recent years, however, it has become increasingly common to eschew any appeal to autonomy or collective self-government, and instead attempt to explain democracy's intrinsic value on the basis of equality alone. The leading contemporary versions of this approach understand the relevant kind of equality in relational terms. Niko Kolodny (2014*a*, 2014*b*), for example, thinks that political inequalities constitute an objectionable social hierarchy, akin to hereditary caste. Democracy is intrinsically valuable, on his view, because it avoids contributing to such hierarchies. Daniel Viehoff (2014) thinks that equalities of political power have intrinsic value because they partly constitute certain egalitarian relationships, akin to friendships, that are themselves intrinsically valuable.⁷ Both views, then, locate the intrinsic value of democracy exclusively in the contribution that political equality makes to egalitarian social relationships.

Meanwhile, even among those theorists who do value self-government on freedom or autonomy grounds, it is common to understand this value in negative terms. The idea is that certain sorts of unequal, arbitrary, or unaccountable interpersonal power relations make you unfree. But the state is an essentially coercive enterprise. So, how can citizens be free while being subject to the power of the state? Some think that self-government provides the solution to this problem: as long as citizens govern the state, the thought goes, its coercive power doesn't impair their freedom. Versions of this view differ in how they spell out the relevant kind of freedom, the nature of the threat posed by political coercion, and the ameliorative role of self-government.⁸ But they agree in relegating self-government to a negative, protective role. In this way, they are much like the egalitarian views discussed above: they all take the intrinsic value of democracy to consist in preventing certain objectionable (unequal or freedom-impairing) power relations, though they understand the objection to those relations in different ways.⁹

We are sympathetic to the relational account of the value of political equality, and we are open to the idea that democracy protects autonomy, but we deny that these exhaust democracy's intrinsic value. The point of democracy isn't just to avoid being under someone else's thumb; self-government is a good thing in its own right. It is a positive form of autonomy, understood as the authorship of one's life. Just as it is valuable for me to be the author of my private life, it is valuable for me to share in the joint-authorship of our common political life. We will call this *democratic autonomy*.

Why value democratic autonomy? Well, the rhetoric of self-government and autonomy is remarkably pervasive in both the theory and practice of democracy—so much so that even dictators often claim to be instruments of the popular will. More importantly, in eschewing this important strand of our democratic tradition, theorists deprive themselves of the evaluative resources needed to fully vindicate democracy's intuitive moral significance. In democracies citizens have (some degree of) power over what their governments do. This is part of any plausible

⁷ Viehoff makes clear his rejection of self-government as an intrinsic value of democracy in Viehoff (2017, 291).

⁸ Anna Stilz and Philip Pettit defend two important contemporary versions of the freedom-protecting view of self-government. According to Stilz, the state's 'coercion presumptively threatens autonomy' (2019, 107), but "[w]here the state's use of coercion reflects subjects' own judgments as to how, and by whom, they should be governed" (2019, 107) this "allows individuals to experience autonomy, even while subject to political power" (2019, 107). The threat state coercion poses to freedom is disabled, on Stilz's view, by this relation between citizen judgments and state institutions. According to Pettit (2012), democratic institutions prevent the state from dominating its citizens, and so from rendering them unfree in the 'republican' sense of freedom as non-domination.

⁹ In particular, they disagree as to whether the objection consists in missing out on a good, or suffering an evil, or perhaps some non-axiological complaint.

definition of democracy. But one way to avoid problematic political power relations is for no one to have any political power. If that were the only thing intrinsically valuable about democracy, the full realization of democracy's intrinsic value wouldn't, in principle, require anything recognizable as a democracy at all. That seems like the wrong result. One needs full-blooded democracy, we think, to realize the full value of democracy.

We can back up the point with some science fiction. Imagine a reliable deity creates an algorithm for morally impeccable legislation: input current social conditions and it produces perfectly just laws.¹⁰ We could change our constitution, replacing our legislature with the algorithm. In a society as gravely unjust as ours, weighty reasons speak in favor of making the change. Still, it seems clear that in doing so we would be losing out on some important democratic value. A theory of democracy's value should account for that sense of loss. The problem doesn't consist in interpersonal power relations, since under the algorithm everyone is equally powerless. A natural hypothesis, we think, is that the loss of influence over our government is regrettable because it deprives us of democratic autonomy.

Some philosophers (not us!) find this case too fantastic to confidently assess. But the legislative algorithm is effectively just a high-tech version of the familiar democratic concern with government by the 'dead hand of the past.'¹¹ It is a common and plausible idea that entrenched constitutional constraints are, in some way, anti-democratic. But the problem isn't with interpersonal power relations: the constitution isn't a person, and the people who wrote it are dead.¹² Kolodny, at least, is happy to concede this point (Kolodny 2014*b*, 312). He thinks that if 'the dead hand of the past' is problematic, it is for purely instrumental reasons. Rigid constitutional constraints, on his view, pose no essential threat to democratic values. But the case of the legislative algorithm suggests that the problem with the dead hand of the past cannot be fully explained away in instrumental terms. The legislative algorithm is stipulated to have excellent consequences. Yet it nevertheless seems to involve an important loss of democratic values.

There are some other difficulties in explaining democracy's value solely in terms of interpersonal power relations. For one, the full realization of the value of democracy seems to depend, constitutively, on *actual participation*; if I don't take part in the public life of my society, then there is an important part of the value of democracy which I do not enjoy. Yet the concern with problematic power relations is most often interpreted as concerned with the equal distribution of access to or opportunity for political influence, rather than with the distribution of political influence as actually exercised (Kolodny 2014*b*, 197); power, after all, is an opportunity concept, and you are not my superior or master or dominator simply because you voted and I didn't. Our view is that the politically apathetic miss out on the good of democratic autonomy.

Relatedly, the *quality* of people's participation seems to matter to democratic values. For example, many political scientists think that most citizens are ignorant and irrational.¹³ They know very little about politics. When they reason about politics, they bend the evidence to show their party in the best possible light. This, if correct, is disquieting, for reasons over and above its bad effects. It seems to undermine part of a democratic good. Yet, again, the problem here is not merely that some people enjoy unequal, arbitrary, or unaccountable power over others. It would not be solved

¹⁰ The example is drawn from Zuehl (2016).

¹¹ The term, and the point, comes from Jefferson (1968[1789]). The objection to the dead hand of the past is importantly distinct from an objection to 'juristocracy' (rule by judges). It would persist even if the constitutional court were democratically elected, so long as the constitution provides substantive political constraints.

¹² This assumes – plausibly, we think – that the relevant sort of problematic power relation can't exist between the dead and the living.

¹³ For a review of the evidence, see Achen and Bartels (2016, 36–41, 267–297).

were all citizens *equally* ignorant and irrational. That would exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, the problem. Instead, the problem lies, at least in part, in the value of self-government. To make autonomous choices requires some measure of knowledge and rationality. If ordinary citizens really are ignorant and irrational, then this undermines their ability to make such choices. Thus, even when they participate in politics, they fail to get much of the value of self-government.¹⁴

It seems to us, then, that there is a powerful *prima facie* case that democratic autonomy is a genuine and important value, and an essential part of the overall value of democratic institutions. Our main aim in this paper is to advance an account of this value. In short, we think that self-government should be understood in terms of joint authorship. Joint authorship should itself be understood in terms of joint intentions: when self-government is achieved, citizens' joint intentions are made manifest in state policy. Achieving this is valuable in the same sort of way that it is valuable to be individual author of one's private affairs. Both consist in important features of one's life expression one's intentions. Both contribute to one's autonomy in an important, positive, sense of autonomy. Democracy is valuable, in part, because it enables citizens to enjoy such autonomy with respect to their social and political affairs.

Still, if this idea of democratic autonomy is as appealing as we claim—and if its rejection leads to such counter-intuitive results—why is it so seldom defended? The reason, we think, is that there are obvious differences between the individual choices that constitute autonomy in private life, and the role an individual citizen plays in collective decisions determined through democratic procedures; it is up to me what *I* decide, but it isn't up to me what *we* decide. These differences can make it seem like collective decision-making couldn't realize a genuine kind of autonomy. Kolodny and Viehoff, we think, have both been convinced by these considerations. But these problems are not insoluble. Properly understood, they lead not to the rejection of democratic autonomy, but rather to a novel account of its nature. On the view we propose, democratic autonomy is an essentially social phenomenon: it consists essentially in *jointly* authoring our shared political lives. By developing such an account, we aim to defend the possibility of democratic autonomy.

Yet, before that, let us distinguish our way of conceiving of the value of self-government from a prominent alternative. Some people think that self-government is important simply because it protects citizens' freedom. We don't deny that political self-government has such a role. But we insist that this doesn't exhaust the value of such self-government. As the thought experiment of the legislative algorithm brings out, governing ourselves isn't just a way to avoid being governed by someone else: it is a good thing in its own right. The idea that self-government enables a form of self-authorship in the political domain explains the nature of this positive good. It is that good we aim to illuminate.

Our discussion proceeds as follows. In section 2, we'll develop our account of the value of democratic autonomy, and show how the idea of joint-authorship allows our view to avoid certain common objections. In section 3, we explore how democratic institutions facilitate this value, and which forms of democracy do so most effectively. In sections 4 and 5 we address some remaining objections to our account. In section 6, we outline how the value of self-government and that of equality relate.

¹⁴ This argument is from (and is spelt out in more depth in) Lovett (2020).

2. Self-Government as Self-Authorship

The view we will defend here is that self-government is valuable as a form of autonomy. We follow Joseph Raz in understanding autonomy as the authorship of one's own life (self-authorship, for short).¹⁵ The autonomous life is authored by its subject; it is shaped in significant part by their choices, and so it reflects or expresses their purposes, priorities, and personality, as those develop over time. In short, we will say that the self-authored life expresses the author's aims or intentions. This seems like a good thing. People don't just want to live lives full of good stuff; they want to live lives of their own making. Consider your romantic partner, or your career, or where you live. It is valuable to be with someone you choose to be with, rather than to have your partner chosen by lottery. It is valuable to have the career you choose to have, rather than have it decided entirely by events outside your control. It is valuable to live where you choose to live, rather than be tossed around by the waves of fate. The value here is not simply instrumental. It's not just that you're likely to make better decisions about your partner or career than chance, or than anyone else. Authoring one's life is a good thing in its own right.

Clearly, such authorship not just a matter of approving, endorsing, or liking the life one leads or has led: expressing one's aims isn't the same as matching them. At a minimum, self-authorship requires causing the relevant aspects of one's life. (We say more about the nature of this causal requirement below). Liberalism and democracy are, among other things, two different strategies for realizing the causal connections that self-authorship requires. Liberal institutions enable self-authorship in our private lives by protecting a sphere of personal choice. They thus enable causal connections between our own choices and various features of our personal lives. Democratic institutions create the causal mechanisms which make it possible for our social and political lives to be shaped by our choices. They thus extend self-authorship from our personal to our social and political affairs—areas of our lives that would otherwise remain beyond the sphere of our deliberate agency. This kind of autonomy consists in jointly authoring the parts of our lives that we share with our fellow citizens. In our view, the value of self-government consists in the achievement of such authorship.

This, we think, is an appealing view. But it faces an obvious line of objection. Citizens seem to stand in quite different relations to personal decisions than they do to democratic ones: the former they individually determine, the latter they each have only a say in. Why think that whatever autonomy-value inheres in the former carries over to the latter?

As it stands, this objection is too impressionistic to engage with. Here is one way of making it more precise. We just observed that authoring some aspect of your life requires causing it: mere approval isn't enough. But, you might think, individual voters don't cause political decisions or their consequences. After all, it's almost never the case that the outcome of an election (and so the consequences that follow from that outcome) counterfactually depends on how any single voter decides to vote. Were any single voter to have voted differently, the outcome of the election would not have changed. So, you might think, participating in the democratic process almost never makes any individual citizen the author of its outcome.

Put in this way, the objection depends on an implausibly narrow conception of causation. It depends on the thought that causation requires counterfactual dependence: A causes B only if, were A not to have occurred, then B would not have occurred. Yet, as others have observed, there is a clear and intuitive notion of causation—we might term it “causal contribution” or “partial causation”—that does not require such counterfactual dependence (see, e.g., Goldman 1999). When you vote for a winning candidate, you causally contribute to their victory. Their victory may

¹⁵ As he famously puts it, “[t]he autonomous person is part author of their life” (Raz, 1986, 370).

not be counterfactually dependent on how you voted. But, nonetheless, your vote is one of its (many) partial causes. This is the notion of causation in which democratic institutions enable a causal connection between citizens' choices and their social and political affairs. Such institutions set up mechanisms that allows citizens to influence those affairs, or which establish a connection of partial causal or causal contribution between what citizens want (politically) and what happens. So this way of articulating the objection is not persuasive.

But there is another way of articulating the objection that has more traction. This way is based not on a requirement of causation but on one of control. Authoring some aspect of your life, it might seem, requires more than merely causally contributing to how one's life goes in that domain. It requires control over that aspect of your life. Yet, clearly, individual citizens in a democracy don't control the operation of their state; so, the objection concludes, democratic citizens do not count as authors of the activities of their state.¹⁶

This objection tells against *atomistic* conceptions of democratic self-authorship. Such views construe the authorship of our social and political affairs as the same, in all important respects, as the authorship we can enjoy over our private affairs.¹⁷ Yet authorship over our private affairs *does* seem to require our having control over them. It's important that we each have some control over our who we marry, what career we pursue and where we live. Only then, so it seems, will such things manifest our individual intentions. But, as the objection points out, citizens can't all have such individual control over our social and political affairs. So, if authorship is construed along these atomistic lines, democratic autonomy is an unachievable ideal. It is simply impossible for the state's activities to express multiple of its citizens' individual intentions at once.

How do we evade this objection? We reject the atomistic conception of self-authorship. We think that it is valuable for one's personal affairs to express one's individual intentions: this makes one sole author of those affairs. But this is not the only kind of authorship. One's affairs can also express one's *joint* intentions. A joint intention is an intention one shares with other people. Imagine you are planning to paint a house. You might decide on the color, and paint it, on your own. Then you will be sole author of the house's color. Its color will express your individual intentions. But, alternatively, you might decide together with another resident what color the house should be. You might, for example, form an intention, with them, that the house be painted blue, and execute that intention together. These joint intentions don't reduce merely to you both individually intending to bring about your aim. You might not have such an individual intention. You might have no wish to paint the house on your own. Rather these are distinctively shared intentions. And just as individual intentions, when expressed, give rise to a kind of authorship, so do joint intentions. This, then, is the kind of authorship important to democratic autonomy. In a democracy, no citizen is *the* author of any important feature of their political environment. But, if all goes well, they can be joint authors.

Various different accounts of the nature of joint intention could serve our purposes, but it will be useful to have a working account on the table. On the view we favor, joint intentions to arise from the interrelated attitudes of individuals.¹⁸ Some plurality of people have a joint intention to X when the following three conditions are met. First, each member of the plurality aims at the plurality X-ing. So, for example, both you and your partner might individually aim that you together paint the

¹⁶ For this objection, see Kolodny (2014a, 210). Essentially the same objection, with slightly different terminology, can be found in Brennan (2016, 89–90), Christiano (1996, 25), Richardson (2002, 57), Buchanan (1998, 17–18), and Altman and Wellman (2009, 18–20).

¹⁷ See, for example Philpott (1995, 356–58).

¹⁸ The account that follows is based on Bratman (1992). There are many other accounts of what joint intentions are. See e.g., Gilbert (2009), Velleman (1997), Pettit and Schweikard (2006). One could execute our view with one of these alternative accounts. But we think that it is useful to go forward with a concrete account.

house blue. Second, each member of the plurality has a plan to contribute to their together X-ing and these plans are jointly compatible. So, you might plan to paint the front and back of the house, and your partner might plan to paint the sides of the house. Third, the members of the plurality are mutually responsive.¹⁹ That means that most of them are disposed to execute their plan to contribute to X just in case they think that enough other members are disposed to execute their own such plans for their own execution to facilitate the plurality X-ing. So, if you know your partners won't paint the sides of the house, you won't paint the front and back (and vice versa). Our view, then, is that when these interrelated attitudes bring about something in the normal way²⁰—when they are expressed in the world—those who share in the intention are joint authors of the outcome. And this sort of joint authorship is valuable in much the same way that individual authorship is valuable.

It is intuitively plausible that such joint authorship is valuable. To see this, consider two examples. First, imagine you are a partner in a business. You plan on strategy together with the fellow partners, and once a strategy is hammered out you each have a role to play in implementing it. Some people have to call clients; other have to build products; others have to cut costs. If you all play your role and so implement the strategy successful, you are joint authors of the strategy's success. You share this authorship with your fellow partners, and this sort of collaborative action is a valuable thing. Second, consider marriage. In a healthy marriage, the partners both shape the norms and expectations that structure their relations together. In many cases they start with shared ideas, drawn from a common cultural repertoire, about the kind of relationship they are signing up for. But much of the value of a relationship comes in the ways the partners make it their own. When they succeed in doing so, its norms and expectations express their joint intentions, and they thereby enjoy a distinctive kind of autonomy: the autonomy of jointly authoring their relationship. The value of joint authorship extends to political cases too: it is valuable to jointly author your social and political affairs. This allows us to bypass the objection from control: in all these cases someone can be a joint author of something without individually controlling it. Our view is that self-government consists in citizens being, in this sense, joint authors of their state's activities.

Let's distinguish our view from a different class of non-atomistic view. These views employ a *corporatist* notion of self-authorship.²¹ On this notion, the citizens together form a corporate, or group, agent. We might call this agent "The People." This agent has a will of its own—distinct from that of any individual citizen—and that will can be expressed by state action. When the state's actions do express the will of The People considered as a group agent, the group agent is autonomous, and this is a good thing. We reject such views. The general problem with them is that they struggle to connect the autonomy of the corporate entity with the interests of individual citizens. The obvious candidate for such an interest is an interest in autonomy. But it's mysterious what the connection between the autonomy of the group agent and the autonomy of the individual is supposed to be. After all, the group agent's will is, by hypothesis, distinct from the wills of the individual citizens who make it up. On our view, in contrast, the key intentions are those of individual citizens, but they constitutively depend on the attitudes of other individual citizens: they are individual citizens' joint intentions. The contrast lets one see our view as a synthesis of

¹⁹ At this point, accounts of joint intention typically include a requirement that the above conditions being met is common knowledge among the participants in the joint intention. Some such epistemic condition is attractive, but the requirement of common knowledge is implausibly demanding for large-scale groups. There are various ways that we might go about weakening the epistemic requirement, but, for reasons of space, we cannot address the issue here. For discussion, see (Roy and Schwenkenbecher 2021).

²⁰ 'In the normal way' is meant to rule out 'deviant' causal paths. We will discuss this issue shortly.

²¹ Wellman and Altman (2009) defend a view of this general sort, arguing that "the inherent value of democratic rule cannot be grounded in individual rights but rather must be based on an irreducibly collective moral right of political self-determination" (2009, 11). In the main text, we haven't stated the view in terms of rights, but our objection survives translation into these terms.

atomistic and corporatist views. From the former, it takes the exclusive focus on the will of individuals. From the latter, it takes a focus on wills that are more than merely individual; these are intentions grounded in the circumstances of pluralities of people. We believe this synthesis has the virtues of both views while avoiding their vices.

To further clarify our position, we want to make several additional points about the notion of ‘authorship’ at play in both joint and sole uses. First, the sense of ‘expression’ in which authorship amounts to the expression of one’s aims isn’t essentially communicative; the self-authoring agent needn’t intend to communicate anything about themselves through their actions. Rather, their life expresses their intentions in the sense that it realizes or manifests them. This requires a special kind of connection between your priorities and their fulfillment. We’ve already mentioned that this connection is not merely endorsement; it has to be a causal connection. But not just any causal connection will do. Some connections are ‘deviant’ in a familiar but hard-to-define sense. If a third-party constantly arranges the world such that your joint intentions are fulfilled, that may not count as you expressing these intentions. Nevertheless, while difficult to analyze, this idea of expression is perfectly serviceable for our purposes.²²

Second, self-authorship requires that the intentions expressed in one’s life be in some sense authentic. If one is fundamentally alienated from one’s aims and choices, or manipulated into one’s convictions, then one is in a poor position to be author of one’s own life.²³ It follows that, where inauthenticity in political aims is widespread, democracy’s full value will not be realized. This seems like a plausible consequence. We embrace it. Yet it is important to note that, though the value of self-authorship may depend on the authenticity of one’s priorities, we may sometimes owe others the ‘external’ conditions of autonomy regardless of whether they will form an authentic will. This is familiar from the individual case; you may, for example, owe your adult children the chance to make their own decisions even when their will is inauthentic. This may obtain in the democratic case, too. Thus, the claims people have to self-government may be relatively insensitive to whether they will satisfy the ‘internal’ conditions to realize its full value. We might, on autonomy grounds, owe democracy even to those with inauthentic political preferences.

Third, authorship requires an adequate range of options.²⁴ To be author of something one must have a wide range of decent alternative options to that thing. In the individual case, that means one must have been able to do otherwise to what one actually did. In the collective case, the plurality must have been able to do otherwise to what it actually did. To evaluate this, we determine what would have happened had the members of the plurality wanted different things to what they actually did. Suppose that some business partners pursue strategy A because they want to maximize profits, but had they wanted to be environmentally responsible they would have pursued strategy B. In this case, the partners were able to pursue B. In contrast, consider the *corvée* laborers who built the pyramids. They could not have collectively decide to build cylinders or cubes or just return to the farm. This is because they couldn’t coordinate on such alternative activities. If one of them

²² This sense of ‘expression’ features heavily in a variety of philosophical contexts, including discussions of moral responsibility, where various theorists have held that an agent is fit to be held morally responsible for some outcome if and only if that outcome expresses something about them, such as their ‘quality of will.’ Important sources of this idea include Strawson (1974) and Watson (1996). It also seems to be the sense of ‘expression’ at play in Elizabeth Anderson’s expressive theory of rational action, in Anderson (1995).

²³ There is a sizable literature on the conditions under which an agent’s will counts as authentic or non-alienated, much of it following in the wake of Harry Frankfurt’s influential work. See the papers collected in Frankfurt (1988). For our purposes, we needn’t take a stand on the correct account of these matters.

²⁴ Raz (1986, 373–78) endorses this thought. Frankfurt (1969) has some cases that put pressure on it. These cases also apply to joint authorship. To see this, suppose the people in some country elect a right-wing party, but had they elected the Communists a foreign power would have launched a coup and put the right-wingers in power. Here is a case in which the party in power is that the people endorse, but the people could not have put in power a different party. We regard this as a case in which the joint authorship of the people is impaired.

spoke out, or started organizing, that person would have been executed. This made it impossible for them to get together jointly compatible plans to overthrow the pharaoh's yoke. Thus, they were not joint authors of any pyramid's construction. Such coordination difficulties often arise in non-democracies: citizens can't collectively resist the ruling regime, because coordinating resistance is so difficult.²⁵ This means they cannot count as joint authors of the regime, even when they support it. More generally, to count as joint author of something, one must be part of a plurality that could have done otherwise.

Fourth, this idea of joint authorship is 'procedural' rather than 'substantive.' A 'substantive' account of self-authorship holds that an agent is only really the author of their actions, or of the intended outcomes of their actions, if they act on the basis of considerations which in fact justify those actions.²⁶ We think such accounts are implausible: they imply that one cannot author any life which is not perfectly in accord with reason, but we are all too familiar with autonomously authoring things that, on reflection, we had less than sufficient reason to author. However, while we prefer a procedural account of self-authorship, we are open to the idea that there are substantive conditions on its *value*. Indeed, we are even open to the idea that an otherwise bad life, especially a morally bad life, is *worse* for being self-authored.²⁷ If such a view is correct, then self-government can actually be regrettable, when people use their powers of self-government to make objectionable decisions. In that case, the central claim in this paper—that self-government is part of the value of democracy—should be understood to be conditional on the sufficient quality of that self-government.

To summarize, then, the picture is this: an autonomous life is a life you yourself author. Authorship in general is a matter of the expression of intentions. This admits of both individual and shared variants. You are the individual author of something just in case it expresses your authentic individual intentions. You are the joint author of something when it expresses your authentic joint intentions. We think both types of authorship are valuable; it is valuable to be the individual author of one's private affairs and it is valuable to be the joint author of one's social and political affairs. In both cases, we should speak of the relevant value in terms of autonomy. To be the author of one's affairs is to be autonomous in some sense. To be individual author of one's private affairs is to be individually autonomous. To be joint author of one's joint affairs is to enjoy a distinctively collective kind of autonomy. Our view is that democracy's value inheres, in part, in helping individuals achieve this value.

Our discussion so far has focused on articulating political autonomy as a kind of joint authorship. In the next section we will explain how democratic institutions help realize this value.

3. Democratic Participation as Joint Authorship

Let us turn to how democracy facilitates citizens' joint authorship of their social and political affairs, and what that means for concrete democratic institutions. We'll start by more or less stipulatively defining a democracy as a political system with two components: first, citizens all have equal political power and, second, this power collectively largely determines the state's decisions. In such a system, it is the citizens, rather than the party or the king, who set state policy. The second component of democracy, citizen determination of state decisions, is *necessary* for citizen joint authorship of those decisions. If the citizens do not determine state decisions, then those

²⁵ For some discussion of this in the case of Mexico under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), see Magaloni (2006, 193–226).

²⁶ For a helpful discussion of procedural versus substantive conceptions of autonomy, see Christman (2020).

²⁷ Cf. Raz (1986, 390–95).

decisions do not express their shared political aims. Thus, one core component of democracy is a condition for achieving citizens' joint authorship of their political affairs. This is how democracy facilitates the value of self-government.

Let us make this a little more concrete. Consider the creation of Social Security in the United States. Imagine that, by 1932, many Democratic Party voters had formed the aim that they together with their fellow Democrats would bring social security into being. On this basis, they may have formed a plan to vote Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) into office that year. And they may, also on the basis of this aim, have formed a disposition to vote for FDR conditional on their thinking enough other people might for their vote to help get FDR elected. Then, by our account of joint intentions, these Democrats had a joint intention to create social security. Now further suppose that this joint intention, these aims and plans, lead to FDR being elected in 1932 and gave the Democratic Party big congressional majorities in 1934, which lead to the creation of Social Security the subsequent year. Then these citizens, those with the joint intention, would be joint authors of social security. Social security would express their shared aims.

Consider also a different example: that of people authoring a non-policy outcome. Every election, millions of people make voting decisions on economic grounds. They vote for the party who they think will best boost the economy. Plausibly, many voters have a joint intention in this respect: they enter the voting booth intending to contribute to a collective effort, on the part of themselves and like-minded citizens, to ensure that the party who will do best for the national economy takes power. Now suppose that they succeed in doing that: the party with the more economically advantageous policies takes power, and, as a result, the economy grows. In that case, the citizens who shared this joint intention are authors of this outcome. It expresses their shared aim.

So democracy facilitates citizens' joint authorship of their social and political affairs. It is illuminating to compare democratic states with nondemocratic states on this score. In a personalized dictatorship the dictator is, often, the sole author of state policy. Saddam Hussein was, for example, was the author of Iraq's invasion of Iran. He set the policy; he called the shots. In party dictatorships, party members (or perhaps the Politburo) are authors of state policies. The Chinese Communist Party is, today, author of repression in Xinjiang. It is the Party which has set this policy. The citizens of these states who are not members of the ruling party do not share in determining state policy, and so they are not among its authors. It is only that subset of citizens who *do* collectively determine political decisions who are their author. Democracy thus allows more citizens to be authors of government policies (and their outcomes) than does nondemocracy. This is the sense in which democracy helps achieve a distinctively democratic kind of autonomy.

This is true even when the dictator enjoys widespread support. Here there are two different cases to consider. In the first case, the dictator is popular, but the people could not easily remove him were he to become unpopular. This is by far the most common case in the real world. In such a case the dictator's power is not caused by their public support. So, there is little in this political system over which the people are joint authors. In the second case, the dictator could be easily removed if he became unpopular. This doesn't arise in the real world very often. But it may have a counterpart in small-scale, pre-state, societies in which elders make the important decisions (Stilz 2019, 129). The elders might depend entirely on their legitimacy in the wider community, rather than on any coercive apparatus. In such a situation, the people would enjoy authorship over the character of their political system: they are authors of their being ruled by the elders. But, unless they determine what policies the elders actually enact,²⁸ they cannot enjoy authorship over the

²⁸ And, if the community members genuinely do determine policy, calling the political system a "dictatorship" is somewhat misleading. Such a system realizes central features of a well-functioning representative democracy: societal elites make decisions, but under the influence of everyone else.

more fine-grained features of their political affairs. They cannot author what their community actually does. So democracies in principle have an advantage over these (rare) sorts of autocracies too. They help citizens achieve joint authorship over more features of their political affairs.

Democratic states also contrast with nondemocratic organizations of other kinds. Consider, for example, the US army. The US army is a hierarchical organization. The generals decide what it does. But sometimes the army achieves goals which, one assumes, were shared throughout the ranks. When the US army helped liberate France, for instance, the liberation was presumably a goal shared by privates and generals. Why, then, does the army not count as a paragon of soldiers' self-rule? The answer to this question parallels our prior discussion of the pyramids. Soldiers, much like *corvée* laborers, do not have an adequate range of options with respect to their organization's activities, in this case those of the army. This is because the rank-and-file soldiers couldn't coordinate on the invasion of Belgium (over France). They would be punished if they, contrary to the officers' wishes, tried to do so. You cannot, as a private, encourage other soldiers to ignore the orders of the officers: this will get you court-martialed. The point goes generally for hierarchical organizations: those in the upper echelons can make decisions but those in the lower echelons cannot. In contrast, in a democracy citizens have a range of options to choose between when it comes to government policy. If enough of them want different government policy, they can coordinate to bring it about. Thus, soldiers in the army don't enjoy self-rule; citizens in a democracy can do so.

Democratic autonomy, then, requires a core component of democracy. But there are many democratic institutions. Which such institutions, exactly, best serve the value of democratic autonomy? For a start, democratic autonomy can be well-served by directly democratic institutions. The outcomes of initiatives and referendums can express many citizens' joint intentions. When these outcomes are transmitted into policy, that means policy expresses those intentions. Democratic autonomy can also, in principle, be well-served by representative institutions. These institutions have elected representatives determine the details of state decisions. Insofar as ordinary citizens are the (indirect) sources of such decisions, such decisions can express citizens' joint intentions. For this, ordinary citizens must affect policy by affecting what their representatives do. They can do this either by selecting representatives who share their views, or by sanctioning those who diverge from them (Mansbridge 2009). Both can make ordinary citizens the distal source of state policy. So, both direct and representative democracies can realize democratic autonomy. Which one is better at doing so seems to us a practical and contingent matter: we take no stand on this issue.

Yet democratic autonomy cannot be realized by just any non-autocratic arrangements. Most interestingly, we doubt that it can be achieved by all types of deliberative democracy. Some people think that we should create legislative chambers in which a small number of ordinary citizens, chosen by lot, deliberate about policy. The idea is that the chosen citizens will put more thought into policy than they otherwise would, which will lead them to pass better policies than those the public actually supports. Advocates of such systems think that *were* the public better informed it *would* support the policies the deliberative chamber passes. They think that this makes such institutions entirely compatible with democratic values.²⁹ We doubt this. Were such chambers to have legislative power, the policies they implemented would not express the people's will: the causal link between the people's priorities and their government would be severed. This brings out that democratic autonomy requires more than a mere hypothetical connection between citizens' will and state policy. It requires that state policy actually be causally connected to such citizens' wills. Deliberative chambers of the sort described would fail to achieve such a connection.

²⁹ For this view, see Fishkin (2011) and Guerrero (2014).

That completes our account of the value of self-government, and its link to democratic institutions. We turn now to address some objections to this account.

4. Objection I: Winner-Takes-All?

We'll start with an objection from (dis)agreement. One might think that our account makes the value of self-rule, in a sense, too narrow. For, on our view, one is only self-ruling with respect to some policy when that policy expresses one of your shared aims or intentions. But, obviously, people disagree about how their societies should be governed, so they have different and conflicting aims. Where their aims conflict, they have to compete, and only one side can win, so only one side can have their aims expressed in policy. So it will only be those on the winning side (of any particular issue) who enjoy self-rule (with respect to that issue). But one might think this is too restrictive. Is it really true that political 'losers' don't enjoy the value of self-government? Call this the *winner-takes-all objection*.

This objection correctly gets at a consequence of our account. It's true, on our account, that those on the winning side will enjoy more of the value of self-rule than the others. They will enjoy authorship over the policies that the winning side implements. But we think this is a virtue of the account, not a vice. It is very plausible that persistent minorities, for example, enjoy less democratic autonomy than persistent majorities. This, then, is a plausible consequence of our account.

That said, we think that those on the losing side can still enjoy substantial democratic autonomy. This is for two reasons. First, often losers are not perennial losers. Competitive political systems involve an alternation of power. Those who lose today's election won elections in the past. And policy is cumulative. When a party wins power it does not remake policy *de novo*. It just changes, often incrementally, the existing body of policy. Insofar as those who lose contemporaneous elections influenced policy in the past, they still enjoy some self-authorship. They are still author of much of the policies they are subject to, for they are subject to more than the policies of the day. It's true that this won't apply to those who are *never* in the majority; but, intuitively, such persistent minorities share relatively little in the value of self-government.

Second, the policies of the government of the day are not the only important things about a political system. Often, they are not even the *most* important things about a political system. Equally important is the polity's general character.³⁰ At the broadest level, this might consist in it being a liberal democracy. There are many ways of being a liberal democracy: many specific institutional schemes that fall under this general umbrella. People will disagree, of course, about which of these is best, or most just. But that is compatible with widespread agreement that the state should be a liberal democracy *of some sort*: that the various ways of being a liberal democracy are generally preferable to the various ways of not being a liberal democracy. Suppose such an agreement does exist. Then citizens who disagree about specific matters of policy can nevertheless share an intention, based on this 'overlapping consensus' on liberal values, to ensure that their state remains a liberal democracy.³¹ In a democracy which is responsive to public opinion, that shared intention will cause their state to remain a liberal democracy. It won't explain *which kind* of liberal democracy their state is. The causes of that will lie in the more specific intentions of the ruling party or coalition (together with chance, institutional inertia, and other sources of 'noise' in the system). But that is compatible with citizens who share in the less specific intention being joint authors of

³⁰ Dahl (1956, 132–33) and Campbell *et al.* (1964, 283) also make this point.

³¹ The term 'overlapping consensus' is, of course, drawn from (Rawls 1993; 1997).

the fact that their state is a liberal democracy of some sort. After all, higher level causes needn't compete with their lower-level realizers.³²

Of course, some citizens may well reject liberal democratic values, and so fail to share even in this quite general intention in favor of liberal democracy. But they don't have a complaint in such a case. White supremacists, for example, might fail to enjoy a valuable kind of autonomy because they reject liberal democratic values. But we can fairly treat that as their own responsibility; their rejection of these values forfeits their claim to democratic autonomy.

5. Objection II: Scale

Let's now turn to the issue of size. The enormous scale of modern democracies means that each citizen wields a tiny share of influence over collective decisions. As we've already discussed, one of the most influential objections to the idea of democratic autonomy has been the objection from control. Our response to that objection was to describe a form of authorship, *joint authorship*, which does not depend on individual control. But there is an objection in a similar vein, but which does not rely on the claim that authorship requires control. This objection simply points to the tiny share of influence possessed by each individual citizen, and asks: does each of us *really* count as an author of national policy in virtue of having one vote out of 300 million? And even if you do count as an author, isn't your authorship so weak as to be of negligible value? Call this the *objection from scale*.

This is, of course, not a new objection; it is, in effect, the same observation that led Benjamin Constant to conclude that the liberty of the ancients was no longer possible in modern times, since, given the size of modern polities, the influence of any particular individual is simply "lost in the multitude."³³ What should we say about this line of objection? The first thing to say is that it's not so damaging for us to simply grant it. Various thinkers, including Constant, have found it very plausible that the value of collective self-government is heavily diluted in large societies. That wouldn't, on its own, show that our account is without interest. Though democratic autonomy wouldn't then contribute to the justification of contemporary democracies, our account of democratic autonomy could still be interesting, either as a reason for radical social and political reorganization (optimistically), or as a lamentation for a form of political freedom that is no longer accessible to us in the modern age (more realistically).

Yet we find it plausible that the value of self-rule *can* be enjoyed even in large-scale modern societies. So we prefer a less concessive reply. This objection from scale makes most sense when one construes the value of joint authorship in contributory terms. This view says that what is valuable about self-government is simply that it makes one a partial or contributory cause of one's political affairs. The fact that the authorship is *joint* is inessential; what is important is one's individual causal contribution. Call this the *contributory view*. On the contributory view, it is plausible that when one contributes less to one's social and political affairs, one enjoys less of the value of self-government. Authorship, plausibly, scales with individual contribution. So, on this view, the value of self-government is diluted in large states.

But that is not the view that we have advanced. We do not think that joint authorship is valuable because it makes one partial cause of one's social and political affairs. Rather, the way that it is valuable to be joint author of something directly parallels the way it is valuable to individual author of a thing. In both cases the thing expresses your intentions. The difference is just that the case of

³² As (Yablo 1992) persuasively argues in the context of debates about mental causation.

³³ Constant (1988, 303).

individual authorship expresses an individual intention and that of joint authorship a joint intention. On this view, the most plausible position is that one's authorship of something scales not with one's personal causal contribution to it, but rather with how much influence one's intentions exert on it. In the individual case, that does typically require you make a substantial personal contribution to the thing. But in the collective case it does not: one's joint intention might well make an enormous contribution to something even when one's individual intentions makes a small contribution to it. In particular, one's joint intentions might make an enormous contribution to something even when they are shared with tens of millions of people. So, on our view, the value of self-government need not be diluted in large modern states.

Moreover, there are independent reasons to prefer the view that we have advanced over the contributory view. To see this, consider an election where everyone except for a single voter is replaced by some mechanism which casts their votes randomly. Suppose that the side our sole voter cast her vote for wins—the random votes just happened to work out that way. It seems to us that, while this voter's vote would be a contributing cause of that outcome, she would not be an author of it in any meaningful sense. Intuitively, the outcome doesn't manifest her agency in the same way it does when she is on the winning side in a normal election. Why not? Plausibly, because the outcome doesn't express a joint intention she shares with the other voters on her side.

The contributory view does contain a grain of truth. To count as a joint author of something, you must have *some* personal influence on it. That is because your individual features, and perhaps your individual intentions, will exert influence over what you jointly author by dint of partly constituting your joint intention. So, if your joint intentions affect policy, you must have some personal influence on that policy. To put the point differently, suppose your individual intentions exert no influence over some policy. Then we will have little reason to think *your* joint intention causes that policy. Rather, a better candidate cause is the joint intention of a smaller group, a group which includes everyone who does have some personal influence over the policy. Every constituent of this joint intention is causally relevant to the policy, whereas not every constituent of your joint intentions would be relevant to the policy. But that does not imply that the extent to which you are joint author of the thing scales with how much personal influence you have on it. We think that, instead, it scales with the influence your joint intentions have on it. This answers the objection from scale.

We want to address one potential problem with this position. It might seem to imply that, were you joint author of your personal life, you would suffer no loss of autonomy.³⁴ Imagine you jointly authored your choice of spouse or of career, with all your fellow citizens. The view we've just advanced might seem to suggest that this would be just as good as being their sole author. But that is an objectionable result. Patently, one should be sole author of one's choice of career; joint authorship would be noxious. So, one might infer, something must be wrong with our view. The challenge behind this objection is general. There are only certain things the joint authorship of which contributes to our autonomy. Consider Swedish tax policy. Joint authorship over this matters enormously to the Swedes, but it is not so important to Americans. If Americans authored such policy, that would greatly impair the autonomy of Swedish people and not much contribute to their own autonomy. So Swedes, rather than Americans, should determine Swedish tax policy. The challenge, then, is to explain why it is only the authorship of certain things (with certain people) that contributes to one's autonomy.

We wish to say two things in response to this challenge. The first is a dialectical point: this challenge doesn't just arise for joint authorship. It's part of a general problem which arises in the context of

³⁴ Kolodny makes a related objection in passing (2014a, 210), but does not develop it. Brennan (2016, 89) also raises this point.

individual authorship, too. It is important to your autonomy to be author of your own choice of spouse or of career. It is not important to your autonomy to be author of your friend's choice of spouse or of career. So, there are only certain things the individual authorship of which contributes to your autonomy. This challenge thus arises for understanding authorship in general, rather than specifically in understanding joint authorship. So if this challenge undermines the notion of joint authorship, it also undermines that of individual authorship. We're not unhappy with this position: if the value of democratic autonomy lives or dies with the value of autonomy generally, we will count that as a win.

Our second point is more substantive. We think that there is a pre-theoretic notion of what is part of your life, of what is *your business*, and what is not. This notion can go some of the way to resolving this challenge. Who you marry and your choice of career is part of your life alone. It is your business, and not really anyone else's. In contrast, what the state does is not your business alone. It is part of the life you share with your fellow citizens. We conjecture that, when something is your business alone, it is important to your autonomy that you alone are its author. When something is the business of some group alone, it is important to their autonomy that they alone are its joint author. This illuminates why you shouldn't be author of who your friend marries: it's none of your business. It explains why Americans shouldn't jointly author Swedish tax laws, and it explains why your fellow citizens shouldn't jointly author your choice of career. Each case would involve transgressing onto other people's business. Of course, a fully satisfactory development of this point would come with a satisfactory account of when something was and was not someone's business. We don't have such an account. But we think the pre-theoretic notion suffices to reply to the worry that our view implies that joint authorship of your personal affairs would be just as good as individual authorship.

That completes our account of democratic autonomy. In the next section, we turn to exactly how democratic autonomy and democratic equality interact.

6. Self-Government and Equality

We think the value of democratic autonomy and democratic equality are largely independent. Each can be well-achieved without achieving much of the other. We've already seen that much democratic equality can be achieved without achieving any democratic autonomy: the legislative algorithm exemplifies this. Yet much democratic autonomy can also be achieved without achieving any equality. To see this, consider J.S. Mill's system of plural voting. Mill thought that well-educated people, and those with certain occupations, should get extra votes. Such a system would clearly preclude democratic equality. Yet unequal voting power wouldn't prevent citizens forming joint intentions, nor prevent these intentions being made manifest in government policy. So, plural voting systems are compatible with democratic autonomy. Thus, our overall picture of democratic values is a pluralistic one. There is no one master democratic value, but rather two primary, largely independent, democratic values. Yet these values are not *entirely* independent. They are connected in the sense that one can only achieve certain very valuable kinds of democratic equality when one achieves democratic autonomy, and vice versa. Thus, it is no coincidence that democracy unites these values. In the rest of this section, we'll explain how that connection happens.

Our explanation hinges on an expansive conception of democratic equality. We mentioned previously that some people, like Kolodny, think of democratic equality in terms of a bad escaped: they think political equalities allow us to avoid social hierarchies. We agree that this is part of democracy's egalitarian value. But we also think democratic equality has a positive aspect. It allows us to get into positively valuable relationships with our fellow citizens. One should, as in Viehoff (2019), think of these as friendships, but on a civic scale. The idea here is that friendship, at least

ideally, requires equalities of power. Inequalities in power mar a friendship; ideal friendship requires their absence. Of course, that's not all that's required in friendship. Plausibly, friends must also care about one another's welfare, and perhaps they must have affection for one another, as well. But once all these conditions are in place then, in most cases, so is a friendship. And friendships are intrinsically valuable. They are not just bads escaped: they are goods captured.

Such conditions can also be in place when it comes to our relationships with our fellow citizens. Of course these relationships are very different than our relationships to most of our friends. We don't have individual interactions with our fellow citizens. Yet it is not obvious why this should prevent a friendship-like relationship with them from being valuable in itself. It is true that much of the value we get from our friendships comes from the many small interactions we have with our friends. But the value of the relationships itself is not entirely constituted by the value of those interactions. Thus, with Viehoff, we think that 'civic' friendship between citizens is a valuable relationship.³⁵ These relationships would be precluded by asymmetries of power. If some citizens had extra votes, and so extra power over their other citizens, this would preclude the civic version of friendship. Thus, democracy facilitates a positively valuable egalitarian relationship. It doesn't just evade social hierarchies; it engenders civic friendships.

We now connect this to democratic autonomy. On the one hand, among the things it is valuable to author are one's relationships. This is brought out by one of our primary examples of self-authorship: authoring a marriage. It is, we claimed, valuable for marriage partners to author the norms and expectations of their relationship. Their relationship is a distinctive domain in which autonomy can be exercised. As with marriage, so with civic friendship. It is valuable for citizens to author the norms and expectations governing their civic relationship; this too is a distinctive domain over which autonomy can be exercised. But, to a large extent, those norms and expectations are mediated by the state. The state's laws often determine, or even constitute, what we expect of our fellow citizens. If the laws make voting compulsory, we expect them to vote; if the laws set the tax rate at thirty percent of income, we expect them to give thirty percent of their income to the state. Thus, to really author the norms and expectations of these relationships, citizens need democracy. So, the egalitarian relationships that make up the positive aspect of democratic equality are one of the important domains of self-authorship.

On the other hand, these relationships are themselves better when they are responsive to their participants' values and priorities.³⁶ Consider friendship. Imagine you live in a society where the expectations of friendship were entirely rigid. Certain things were expected of friends, and you could not change the expectations. Perhaps, for example, substantial politeness is expected between friends. You cannot lift this expectation; biting sarcasm will always, in this society, be out of place between friends. The norms of your friendships are not responsive to your values. This seems to make your friendships themselves worse. It doesn't make them any less egalitarian; they might still be marked by equality of power. But these relationships would be better were the participants able to mold them as they willed. As with the personal, so with the political. The relationship of civic friendship is better when its participants are able to author its norms and expectations. Yet that is just to say that joint authorship of this part of the social domain is necessary for realizing the full value of these relationships. The full value of democratic equality, then, is realized only by realizing democratic autonomy.

So democratic equality and democratic autonomy are independent but entwined. Egalitarian relationships are an important domain of authorship. And the full value of such relationships is in

³⁵ See Viehoff (2019, 25–34) for an extended discussion of this.

³⁶For a very similar point, see Viehoff (2019, 32).

part contingent on that authorship. On our view, it is the genius of democratic institutions that, when all goes well, they facilitate both these values.

7. Conclusion

Let us sum up. Our claim is that being joint author of one's social and political affairs is valuable, and that democracy facilitates this value. The value of joint authorship flows naturally from the idea that a shared will is a type of will which, in an important sense, belongs to the individuals who share it. Since it is generally valuable for one's affairs to express one's will, it follows that it is valuable for one's affairs to express one's shared will. Democracy facilitates this because democracy consists, in part, in citizens collectively determining what their government does. This is a necessary component of their authoring government actions. Democracy thus helps realize a distinctive kind of autonomy, the value of jointly authoring our affairs. This isn't the only part of democracy's value—we think democratic equality is of value too. But this distinctively democratic kind of autonomy is, we think, ineluctably part of what makes democracy worthwhile.

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