

***Future Publics:
Democracy, Deliberation,
and Long-Term Decision-Making***

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Introduction

Political theorists have traditionally favoured either historical approaches or atemporal analyses. The former makes connections between the past and the present; the latter views political relationships only with reference to relatively thin slices of time. It is not difficult to see why these approaches are so common. Historical analyses shed light on contemporary issues and help current period political actors understand the context in which their decisions must be made. Atemporal analyses recognize that collective decisions are made by contemporaries and only those who currently exist are useful political allies or worrisome foes. Yet many decisions – whether public or private – have *future-oriented* impacts and effects, as well as benefits or burdens that will be unevenly distributed among our contemporaries and successors. Indeed, many of our most intractable political problems have temporally distributed impacts. Environmental degradation, public pension plans, education spending, deficits, and debt accumulation are just a few examples.

Democratic theory has similarly neglected the complexities of time and the long-term impacts of our collective decisions. Democracy, in theory and in practice, is more often associated with short-termism than with effective long-term decision making. In addition, considerations of time raise certain dilemmas that challenge the normative foundations of democratic theory. Past political actors who no longer exist or have exited the political arena may still be responsible for their decisions but they cannot be held accountable in the traditional sense of the term. The applicability of the all affected interest principle is also called into question by the passage of time: Those who do not yet exist cannot play a meaningful role in making collective decisions today, even though current period decisions will come to affect those who exist in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a general theory of temporal democracy. I argue that this theory must look beyond the electoral arena, where short-term political incentives prevail, and towards a broader more deliberative conception of democracy. Furthermore, in order to better understand the political relationships that exist between temporally distributed actors, I argue that it is useful to integrate theories of intergenerational justice, which tend to emphasize our moral obligations to the future, with a broader understanding of the freedom and autonomy that each generation will come possess. Lastly, I take theoretical insights about the relationship between deliberative democracy and environmental politics and argue that these theories are equally applicable to a range of temporally complex issues. This paper is a part of a larger project that seeks to describe a general theory of democracy that is applicable to short-, medium-, and long-term time scales.

The first section of this paper addresses some of the challenges of time in democratic theory and practice. Section 1.1 briefly considers time's relationship to three democratic goods: provisionality; the all affected interests principle; and accountability. The first is applicable only as a function of the passage of time. The latter two goods, by contrast, are fundamentally challenged and changed when democratic theory and practice is examined in a temporal context. Section 1.2 deals with the question of whether democracy is inherently myopic. I argue that those who believe that it is tend to equate 'democracy' in general with 'electoral democracy' in particular. This, in turn, represents a relatively narrow conception of the nature and potential of democracy.

The second section briefly describes two concepts that are central to the rest of the paper. Section 2.1 draws distinctions between short-, medium-, and long-term time scales. I argue that

political relationships between temporally distributed actors are fundamentally different depending on the time scale that is being examined. In this paper I am primarily interested in long-term time scales and the relationships that exist between political actors in non-overlapping generations. Section 2.2 explains my use of the term 'future publics'. I argue that this terminology encourages us to think about future political actors as collectivities instead of individuals. The reason that this is important is that future individuals are indeterminate from our perspective in time.

Section 3 outlines the nature of the political relationships that exist between actors in non-overlapping generations. Those who are interested in the role of time in political theory have tended to emphasize either the connections or the disconnections between temporally distributed political actors. I argue that our relationship with the future is characterized instead by both connections and disconnections, and that this establishes a kind of tension between, on the one hand, the dominance of the present over the future, and on the other hand, the inalienable freedom of future political actors to make their own decisions.

The last section of the paper considers the question of what a general theory of temporal democracy might look like. The central claim is that democratic practices that are ideally deliberative and robustly communicative are better equipped to manage the complexities of time – and thereby help preserve the normative foundations of democracy – than those that are less deliberative. These theoretical arguments do not map directly onto any particular institutional designs and should instead be read as general claims about *doing* democracy discursively. The first claim (Section 4.1) is that 'good' deliberative and communicative practices can expand the time horizons of decision makers and help balance the concerns of current and future publics. The second claim (Section 4.2) is that *acting* effectively over time necessarily involves establishing democratic and communicative relations between temporally distributed political actors. From this perspective, far from being inherently myopic, I argue that democracy is required within a temporal context.

1. Democratic Theory and Practice: The Challenges of Time

1.1 Time in Relation to Three Democratic Goods

The relationship between time and democracy is both productive and problematic. In one respect, the passage of time underpins an important source of legitimacy in democratic politics. Democratic leaders and elected representatives are regularly challenged and they must be re-elected at regular intervals. Collective decisions are always (at least ideally) subject to regular reviews and revisions. In majoritarian systems, minorities must have real opportunities to challenge or reverse (if they can) majority decisions that have been or will be made. In other words, democratic decisions are and must be provisional (e.g. Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

In other respects the passage of time challenges rather than supports the normative foundations of democratic theory. When political issues are understood to be situated *in* time – that is when benefits and burdens are distributed across time, or when decisions are separated from impacts by significant intervals of time – the normative principles underpinning democracy are altered, challenged, made extremely difficult to maintain, or rendered impossible to fulfil.

One way of looking at this problem is through the lens of the all affected interests principle. This principle states that, *all those who are affected by public decisions ought to have some meaningful and sustained role in making those decisions*.¹ Whelan (1983) has called this one of the most “intuitively plausible proposals” but he ultimately rejects it as “fundamentally untenable” (Whelan, 1983, pp. 16, 19). One reason it is “fundamentally untenable” that it is expansionary with respect to both place and time. As Goodin (2007) argues, according to the terms of the “all affected interests” principle “virtually” everyone in the world must be included in the demos, including those “in all possible future worlds” (p. 55).

If this is the case, the normative demands of the principle are not only impractical to meet they are in fact *impossible* to fulfil. Goodin (2007) points out that we cannot determine who is and who is not affected by public decisions *before* they are made. “Notice first that those whose interests are ‘affected’ by any actual decision depends upon what the decision actually turns out to be. Notice second that what the decision actually turns out to be depends, in turn, upon who actually makes the decision.” (p. 52) Fung (2010) has identified these as problems of ‘endogeneity’ and ‘indeterminacy’, respectively. These are irresolvable problems of decision making that are functions of time itself.

The passage of time also challenges – or changes – familiar conceptions of accountability. Democratic accountability has developed into a textured, complex concept that encompasses multiple dimensions including the punitive and the communicative (Behn, 2001; Dunn, 1999b; March & Olsen, 1995; Philp, 2009; Pitkin, 1967; Warren, 2008). *Punitive accountability* prevails when democratic citizens have the power to reward or sanction decision makers. In the political realm, the election is the most familiar mechanism of punitive accountability. *Communicative accountability*, by contrast, requires decision makers to ‘give accounts’ of their decisions. The logic of this is that the affected are, at minimum, owed explanations from those who make public decisions. Communicative accountability might seem like the weakling cousin of punitive accountability but it is decidedly more than that – it is impossible to apply punitive accountability fairly and consistently if communicative accountability is not also obtained.

The obvious point is that time, and in particular any long interval of time, severs the relationship between those who are affected by public decisions and those who are responsible for making them. Punitive accountability is impossible to extract if those who were responsible for making public decisions in the past no longer exist, just as it is extremely difficult to apply to those who are no longer active in the public arena. If future political actors do not agree with the substance of decisions that were made in the past there is nothing they can do about it.

One option is to place new emphasis on the role of communicative accountability, which can be rendered operational across time if the rationales underpinning public decisions are articulated, documented and transmitted to future publics. Over long intervals of time (such as generations) this will necessarily become a one-way communication process, a fact that challenges but by no means undermines the legitimizing force of communicative accountability. Each of these democratic goods is dependant on or altered and challenged by the passage of time.

¹ This is my own formulation of this principle. For a discussion of various other formulations see Fung (2010). Goodin (2007) provides a useful analysis of the all affected interests principle and its alternatives. Heyward (2008) reviews alternative formulations of the principle and addresses some of the difficulties involved in applying it in a temporal context.

1.2 Are Democratic Systems Structurally Myopic?

There are many reasons why democratic systems may be structurally myopic and ineffective at addressing long-term issues. Elected politicians face strong incentives to develop and support policies that have noticeable net benefits in the near-term. They also face equally strong incentives to discount potential solutions to long-term problems if these have relatively high costs in the near-term (e.g. Downs, 1957; Nordhaus, 1975).

Even those who study long-term policy making in democratic systems have noticed that constraints on democracy help account for situations in which elected officials have adopted long-term visions and taken farsighted actions. Jacobs (2008), for example, has pointed out that even though “politicians seeking re-election avoid costly investment in the long run when they fear near term punishment at the polls” (p. 194), they can and often do make longer-term decisions when they do not face imminent punishment at the polls. Governments will be relatively well insulated from electoral punishments when the general public or organized interests are unaware of an issue or any of its potential short-term costs; when opposition parties are weak or divided; or where the number of veto points is small and those who hold power are comparatively free to make decisive choices. In other words, when public awareness, government responsiveness, and accountability are at a minimum, governments will be freer to think and act over the long-term.

This is, of course, not the whole story. Many of the same scholars have also emphasized the legitimate and often effective role that democratic citizens or organized interests *can* and *do* play in encouraging governments and elected officials to make long-term environmental (e.g. Harrison, 1996), social (e.g. Jacobs, 2008), or economic (e.g. Alt & Crystal, 1983) policy investments.

But there is still some concern that democratic systems tend, on balance, to be myopic and that long-term thinking and acting may require some constraints on democracy (e.g. Beckman, 2008). Tonn and Hogan (2006), for example, have argued that the House of Lords in the UK is better positioned to guard the interests of future generations than is any elected chamber like the House of Commons or the US Senate or House of Representatives.

What is being argued...is that it is difficult for conventional representative government to adequately deal with future-oriented issues. The House of Commons, like the United States Congress, is designed as a forum to deal with today's problems and find solutions to benefit those who are dealing with today's problems. The House of Commons allocates resources according to the self-interests of today's representatives and their constituents. Pressures to respond to immediate needs to maintain the support of one's constituency in order to ensure re-election are very powerful (p. 116).

The central idea expressed in this passage is that democracy (in general) is associated with short-termism (in general), and that long-term visions are more likely to be found in an unelected chamber. These assumptions are problematic in at least two respects. The first is that the argument assumes that citizens are (in general) short-sighted, un-influential, or both. Many citizens are undoubtedly focused on their most immediate needs and interests, but this does not mean that they are not also motivated by longer-term concerns or obligations to future generations (e.g. Thompson, 2009). Scholars such as Page (1999) argue that these longer-term motivations can be

politically influential and have, for example, helped initiate political action on environmental issues such as climate change.

Findings from a recent survey-based experiment also suggest that citizens do not, as a matter of course, radically discount the future. Jacobs and Matthews (2008) argue that uncertainty – and not future discounting *per se* – may be the driving force behind short-term thinking. In their survey experiment, respondents who were made to feel uncertain about the viability of long-term policy solutions were less willing to incur short-term costs to obtain potential future benefits when compared to those who were made to feel more certain about the viability of long-term policy solutions. Their findings suggest that voters are not intransigently myopic and that they will, under certain conditions willingly support longer-term policies and objectives. This is consistent with the idea that individuals (both voters and their elected representatives) have immediate interests and concerns as well as ‘lifetime transcending’ ones (Thompson, 2009).

There is no reason to think that democratic systems will be short-sighted, or that they are inherently myopic if citizens themselves are not also myopic. The alternative (and more plausible) assumption is that the temporal horizons of elected officials can and will be extended when citizens adopt longer-term visions and can meaningfully influence their elected representatives.

The second problem with the idea that democracy (in general) is associated with short-termism (in general), is that it represents a relatively narrow conception of the nature and potential of democracy. Tonn and Hogan (2006) focus their attention on *electoral* democracy and conclude that an unelected chamber might be more farsighted; but electoral democracy is not the only legitimate form of democracy (in theory or in practice) and there may be some institutional forms that are both farsighted *and* democratic. This paper argues that deliberative democracy – and by extension any institutional reforms that enhance communicative or deliberative practices within political arenas – can help extend the time horizons of political actors both *within* and *outside* established electoral institutions.

Before examining the nature of the political relationships between ‘current publics’ and ‘future publics’ it will be useful to clarify some of the differences between short-, medium-, and long-term time scales. I address these issues in the next section of the paper and explain why I prefer to talk about current and future publics as opposed to speaking in more familiar terms about current and future generations or individuals.

2. Time Scales and Future Publics: Two Central Concepts

2.1 Time Scales: The Short-, the Medium, and the Long-Term.

A general theory of temporal democracy must be applicable to all time scales, and while it is imperative to make distinctions between the short-, the medium-, and the long-term, this is not an easy task. Where should the lines be drawn? Are there meaningful distinctions between the short-term and the medium-term? What is the difference between the medium-term and the long-term? In one context ten years might be a relatively short period of time; in a different context ten years might feel like a very long time indeed. There are no discreet divisions between time-scales and any meaningful distinctions depend, at least in part, on subjective judgements. With this in mind, I would like to propose that distinctions between the short, the medium-, and the long-term be

clarified with reference to relationships between ‘current publics’, ‘future selves’, and ‘future publics’, respectively.

‘Current publics’ are collectivities of political actors who share the same station in time. ‘Future publics’ are collectivities that are populated by future political actors. ‘Future publics’, in turn, may or may not include our ‘future selves’. According to this topology, short-term decisions will primarily affect current publics or existing political actors. Decisions with medium-term consequences will affect future publics comprised of political actors, some of whom are our future selves and some of whom are not. Following from this, the distinction between the medium- and the long-term can be conceived of as the difference between ‘future publics’ that include our ‘future selves’ (medium-term) and ‘future publics’ that do not include our future selves (long-term).

These distinctions are useful because they capture the subjective orientations that different political actors must have towards the future. From the perspective of someone who is relatively young, a 50-year policy plan may be meaningfully understood with reference to his or her future self and ultimately conceived of as a medium-term policy. For those nearing old age, the same policy must be thought of as a long-term proposition. These distinctions are politically relevant because different time scales have different impacts on relationships between existing and potential political actors. Most importantly, relations between temporally distributed political actors very much depend on whether those who are acting in the current period (i.e. the short-term) think of themselves as being included in the population that will be affected in the future. In the medium-term – where our future selves are included in future publics – many dimensions of political relationships – such as self-interest, reciprocity, and accountability – may be changed or challenged but they will, nonetheless, remain intact even though the relevant political actors are distributed in time.

The situation is entirely different when it comes to long-term issues. In this case, current period political actors will have no individualistic connections to the future publics that will be affected by their decisions. This means that many political motivations – such as self-interest – will be fundamentally altered, as will the balance of power between actors who are distributed over long intervals of time. It is not, for example, possible to have reciprocal relationships between political actors from non-overlapping generations. The passage of time also undermines the viability of mechanisms designed to support productive and fair political relationships. For instance, it is not possible to mitigate power imbalances by increasing the political influence of marginalized interests if those marginalized interests do not yet exist and are marginalized by virtue of the fact that they do not yet exist.

This paper focuses on (some of) the challenges of long-term decision-making. I am therefore primarily concerned with the nature of political relationships between actors in non-overlapping generations. In other words, I am interested in political relationships between current publics and future publics, over the long-term. Relations between political actors over the short-, the medium-, and the long-term are sufficiently different from each other so that treating each separately is both theoretically and practically warranted. I have made initial attempts to address some of the issues related to making medium-term decisions elsewhere (MacKenzie & O'Doherty, 2010; MacKenzie & Warren, 2010).

2.2 Why 'Future Publics'?

There are two reasons why I prefer the terms *current* and *future publics* to the more familiar terms *current* and *future generations*. The first is that democratic theory – and in particular theories of democratic representation – must remain cognizant of the structure of the demos. Democracy is ultimately concerned with the power and influence of individuals but citizens are situated within socio-political contexts. If collective decisions are to be made democratically, relevant publics in each case must be identified, considered, and engaged (if possible). The terms *current publics* and *future publics* function to remind us of this imperative.

The second reason is that this terminology helps clarify a related and relevant feature of temporality: time requires us to think collectively. The 'future publics' terminology emphasizes this by abstracting away from individuals who may (or may not) come to populate future generations; it calls attention to the fact that specific individuals are not yet separable from, or identified within the collectivities of which some of them will eventually be members. It is for these reasons that it does not make sense to talk about political relationships between current and future *individuals* but does make sense to think about the political relationships between current and future *publics*.

This assertion is a variant of Parfit's (1984) claim that temporal morality (or something like it) requires 'impersonal' as opposed to 'personal' or individualistic principles. Parfit explores some of the complexities of time that undermine or challenge familiar assumptions about the adequacy of what he calls 'Self-Interest Theory'. The Non-Identity Problem is the most widely debated example. With respect to this problem, Parfit argues that individuals cannot coherently claim that they have been harmed by past decisions because, in almost all cases, if different decisions had been made those specific individuals would not exist. As such, actions taken in the current period that lower the quality of life of future generations might counter-intuitively be worse for *no one*. Yet it is conventional to assume that in order for some action to be considered morally wrong it must be worse for someone. If we assume that causing to exist is a benefit, or even that it is not intrinsically either good or bad, current period decisions that adversely affect the quality of the lives of future individuals are not morally wrong because these decisions are either good (if causing to exist can be considered a benefit) or morally neutral (if causing to exist is neither a good or a bad). This conclusion holds for all those lives which are worth living, even those which are just barely worth living.

Of course, Parfit recognizes that there *is* something intuitively objectionable about any current period decision that lowers the quality of life of future individuals when compared to their counter-factual (i.e. unrealized) counterparts – and it is for this reason that the Non-Identity Problem forces us to look for applicable principles that are 'impersonal' as opposed to 'person-affecting.'

Scholars such as Kobayashi (1999) and Page (1999) have proposed *collectivist* solutions to Parfit's Non-Identity Problem. Kobayashi (1999) argues that what we need is a *holistic* perspective that makes direct comparisons between whole collectivities of potential individuals. Each whole unit (however defined) would include all those who come to exist as well as those who do not. Page (1999) takes a more straightforward approach. He points out that Parfit's Depletion Policy example – in which natural resources are depleted in the current period as opposed to being

conserved – “is objectionable in virtue of harming the interests of future collectivities” (p. 119). In other words, what makes the Depletion Policy objectionable is that *the group* of people who would come to exist under this policy will be comparatively worse off than *the group* of people who would have come to exist if the alternative Conservation Policy had been adopted. Thus the relevant choice is not between flawed, less-than-ideal, or shortened lives for particular individuals, or no lives at all for these same individuals; from our perspective in time, the relevant choice is between better or worse outcomes for some collectivity as a whole which is not yet populated with identifiable individuals.

This does not mean that we must adopt a classical republican orientation or even any kind of attachment to an identifiable collectivity such as a nation, state, language or ethnic group. On the contrary, time forces us to abandon attachments to particularities of all kinds – those we might wish to attach to individuals as well as those that we might associate with communities, nations, or groups. We cannot be sure that any particular community *will* persist into the future. When we are talking about very long intervals of time it will be necessary to consider the impacts of our decisions on the future prospects of the whole of humanity.²

Before exploring the theoretical connections between deliberative democracy and long-termism, it will be useful to outline the nature of the political relationship between current and future publics. How are political relations affected by the passage of time? How are fundamental democratic rights – autonomy, freedom, influence, and equality – distributed among groups or individuals who are themselves distributed in time? What *is* the relationship between current and future publics? What *should* this relationship be like? An initial attempt to address these questions is made the following section.

3. Dominance and Freedom: The Relationship between Current and Future Publics

When addressed at all, the relationship between current and future publics is commonly conceived of in one of two ways. There are theorists who emphasize the *connections* between temporally distributed actors or groups, and there are those who emphasize the *disconnections*.³ The

² It is worth noting that focusing on ‘the particular human collectivity’, as Page (1999) recommends, merely reasserts the Non-Identity Problem at the level of the community as opposed to that of the individual. This, however would only be relevant as a consequence of looking far into the future where the particularities of any specific (existing or potential) person or community have become completely obscured by time and uncertainty. In most cases, where the distinct problems associated with spatial and temporal expansion have not been collapsed in this way, it is sensible to compare the potential long-term impacts of specific decisions on particular collectivities which often persist through time longer than any individuals who currently make up their populations.

³ Even those who recognize both the connections and the disconnections between generations tend to emphasize one or the other. For example, Jefferson’s famous phrase “the earth belongs to the living” would appear to neglect the connections, but Ball (2000) has shown that Jefferson also used another more complete and revealing version of the phrase: “The earth belongs *in usufruct* to the living”. This term *in usufruct* means, literally, ‘trusteeship’ and it establishes Jefferson’s (otherwise elusive) sense of the moral connections between generations. In contrast, modern theorists of “intergenerational justice”, such as Rawls (1971, 1993), Barry (1977), and Thompson (2009) have emphasized (as might be expected) the connections between generations. In so far as they are recognized, these authors tended to see the disconnections as a source of a problem that must be managed because it cannot be surmounted.

conservative tradition is the clearest example of the former, seeking to maintain, sustain, and reinforce connections between the present, the past, and even the future. Ball (2000) has characterized this as “an older (and essentially religious) ethic of stewardship” that “emphasizes each generation's responsibility for, and obligations towards, preceding and succeeding generations.” He identifies Edmund Burke as the archetypical representative of this kind of thinking and contrasts this “older ethic” with a “new (and essentially secular) ethic of individualism” (or disconnectedness) (p. 72). The archetypical representative of this kind of thinking is Thomas Paine, whose *The Rights of Man* (1793 [1791]) was written in response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1793 [1790]). Ball argues that according to this newer ethic, “each generation is, or ought to be, autonomous and free to do as its individual members please, without regard to the wishes of earlier or the well-being of succeeding generations” (p. 72).

In contrast, Burke's idea of a “partnership” between generations emphasizes what Ball calls positive “*intergenerational symmetry*: the living have obligations both to the dead and the unborn. The line of obligation is continuous and unbroken from generation to generation, running backwards as well as forward in time” (p. 73).

Paine (1793 [1791]) rejected the concept of an intergenerational partnership, calling it “the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies.” His approach emphasizes the disconnections between generations: “Every age and generation must be ... free to act for itself.... Those who have quitted the world and those who are not yet arrived in it, are as remote from each other as the utmost stretch of moral imagination can conceive. What possible obligation can exist between them?” (pp. 277-79). This is what Ball (2000) calls negative “intergenerational symmetry” – “the present generation has obligations neither to the dead nor to the unborn. The line of obligation is discontinuous and is indeed broken between one generation and another. The earth belongs exclusively to the living” (p. 73).

Ball contrasts the views of Burke and Paine to an alternative that recognizes both the connections and the disconnections between those who are distributed in time. “We might, for want of a better phrase, call this the intergenerational asymmetry. Roughly: an earlier generation cannot bind or obligate a later; but each generation is obligated or bound to leave succeeding generations free to act as they decide” (p. 72). Yet even this formulation of the relationship fails to adequately characterize and emphasize the inalienable freedom that future publics will come to possess.

Our moral obligations to the future derive from the connections between generations. By contrast, the freedoms of future publics are underwritten by the disconnections between temporally distributed actors. Current publics set the conditions in which future publics will come to make their own decisions and as a consequence, current publics can make it easier or harder to act in specific ways (the details of which may not be known in the current period). It is also true, however, that current publics cannot, as Ball recognizes, “bind or obligate” future publics, and if current publics cannot do that we cannot, from our station in time, ever vitiate completely the freedoms that future publics will have to make their own determinations. The only kinds of decisions that would completely eliminate the freedoms of future publics are those that would permanently close off options that future publics might otherwise pursue. Examples of which include the destruction of biodiversity or the destruction of the human race itself. These are the

only sorts of decisions that would eliminate the freedom that future publics would otherwise possess to make their own decisions.

Yet most actions – especially political actions – do not have consequences that permanently close off future options. Decisions on whether to make short- or long-term public investments, or whether to adopt strict or loose constitutional amendment formulae, will make it more or less difficult for future publics to choose certain options, but these decisions will not threaten the freedoms of future publics to make their own determinations and chart their own courses of action. Decisions made in the current period may initiate path dependent processes and make specific future decisions more or less costly (Pierson, 2004), but the freedom of future publics to make their own determinations is protected by the passage of time and the disconnections between political actors who are distributed in time.

So while political thinkers have tended to emphasize one or the other, both the connections and the disconnections between generations play an important role in defining the nature of the political relationship between current and future publics. As Dunn (1999a) argues, the situation is such that current publics have an overarching, unchallenged, and direct power to either benefit or harm future publics but no power to enforce compliance. There is no reciprocal relationship here but there is an intimate one. There is dominance as a result of this unchallengeable power to benefit or harm, but future publics possess the freedom to work, rework, revise, reverse, destroy, and create. The severing of connections between the past, the present, and the future, which is a consequence of the passage of time gives each generation an inalienable freedom to act within its own set of inherited conditions. As long as generations continue to reproduce themselves, freedom will reassert itself anew – at least this potential will continually come to exist as each generation gains a measure of independence from the last. Chains of dominance might be passed down through generations – this too obviously happens and too often with tragic consequences – but the possibility of a rupture is always present and the power of current publics to enforce compliance (i.e. prevent future ruptures) diminishes as their sights are directed to points set further and further into the future.

Hannah Arendt understood these tensions better than many other political theorists, in part because it is the tension between dominance and freedom that motivates much of her thinking. As Canovan (1998) points out, both *The Human Condition* (1958) and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), are “propelled” by Arendt’s reading of “a paradoxical combination of convictions: on the one hand a belief that ‘everything is possible,’ and on the other that human beings are merely an animal species governed by laws of nature or history, in the service of which individuals are entirely dispensable” (p. xi). When these tensions are placed in the context of time – as they are in the *The Human Condition* – the first half of this “paradoxical combination” emphasizes the disconnections between temporally distributed actors; while the second half asserts – especially with respect to history – the connections between temporally distributed publics.

More specifically, Arendt’s interest in the concepts of will, agency, action, freedom, creativity, spontaneity, and natality, exemplifies her understanding of the *disconnections* between temporally distributed political actors. By contrast, her interest in causality, irreversibility, forgiveness, promises, and her opposition to the drawing of political blueprints, exemplifies her understanding of the *connections* between temporally distributed political actors and the moral

obligations that are derived from these connections. Arendt identifies temporal dimensions in each of these concepts and structures these into her understanding of the political realm.

Consider, for example, her treatment of 'the will' in the second volume of *The Life of the Mind* (1978). She argues that the will is “the mainspring of the future” – it is the source of our ability to “start anew” and is thus the origin of our spontaneity, creativity, and agency. Will and agency in Arendt’s thought are distinct concepts but they are both future-oriented. The will, as a mental faculty, relates to *thinking forward* while agency underpins our ability to take future-oriented actions. As Arendt (1961) points out in her essay *What is Freedom?*: “Action insofar as it is determined, is guided by a future aim whose desirability the intellect has grasped before the will wills it, whereby the intellect calls upon the will, since only the will can dictate action” (p. 150).

Furthermore, it is the political process, the active and on-going coordination of individual wills and actions, combined with the passage of time and the plurality of human interests that preserves human freedom, spontaneity, and creativity. Arendt (1958) links these concepts to her understanding of natality, and in doing so she emphasizes the freedoms that are inherent in the relationships between political agents who are distributed in time. Of the three activities that characterize the human condition – labour, work, and action – the latter, she argues, “has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the new comer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities” (pp. 8–9). Arendt’s understanding of action is thus marked by unpredictability and spontaneity as well as a kind of inalienable freedom that comes with the birth of new generations and the passage of time.

The second collection of concepts that Arendt is interested in – causality, irreversibility, forgiveness, and promises – emphasize the *connections* between temporally distributed actors. Action does not take place in a vacuum. Actions, despite being freely willed, are nonetheless conditioned by antecedent factors and have, in their turn, their own effects and consequences, some of which may be unintended and/or unpredictable. There is an intimate relationship between current and future publics precisely because decisions that are made in the current period have consequences that condition the environment in which future decisions will be made.

This is the other side of our relationship with the future. The will, in Arendt’s thought is the source of “spontaneous beginnings”, and while this capacity guarantees that ruptures can and will happen it is also generative of strong connections between generations. According to Arendt (1978): “With the modern age’s concept of Progress and its inherent shift from understanding the future as that which approaches us to that which we determine by the Will’s projects, the instigating power of the Will was bound to come to the foreground” (p. 158). Just as the passage of time furnishes each generation with independence from the past, current publics cannot escape the impact that we will have in shaping the future for the better or for the worse. The forces of spontaneity, creativity, freedom, and natality chaff against our good intentions but they also frustrate our bad ones. The passage of time and the impacts of our decisions therefore establish moral responsibilities to the future. This, in turn suggests that while we are morally obligated to adopt long-term visions and strive for long-term objectives we must also refrain from trying to forcefully achieve objectives set out in rigid political blueprints.

The pertinent question is whether we can chart the future if we cannot constrain future publics? How can we achieve long-term objectives if future publics will be free to rework, revise, dismantle, or destroy the projects of the past? Recognizing that uncertainty is the price that must be paid for freedom, Arendt (1958) offers two mechanisms by which uncertainty and unpredictability can be mitigated without destroying freedom. These are forgiveness and promises. Forgiveness makes action normatively acceptable even though all actions will have some unintended or unpredictable consequences. Promises play a different role: They offer “islands of certainty” in seas of uncertainty (p. 244).

The important point with respect to the preservation of freedom is that promises represent the outcome of a kind of democratic and communicative coordination function – and the power of the promise consists in this coordination function. As Arendt (1958) points out, the force that keeps people together, allowing them to “act in concert” but which is nonetheless distinct from “the space of appearances in which they gather and the power that keeps [the] public space in existence, is the force of mutual promise or contract” (pp. 244 – 245). Furthermore, promises are a function of the will and willing, as a mental faculty, is an internal process that cannot be imposed from without. Promises from those who are free to do as they please must be elicited through communication and persuasion as opposed to coercion or force.

This illustrates a more general point that is germane to the development of a theory of temporal democracy. *The inherent temporality of willing and acting generates democratic conditions*. In a political arena where actors are free to pursue their own objectives, build or rebuild, create or destroy, those who are compelled by either normative considerations or practical stipulations to think and act in future-oriented ways will also be compelled to treat their partners in long-term projects as *democratic* participants who will, at some point, come to have the competence and the freedom to judge, join or reject the projects of the past.

In summary, with the exception of Hannah Arendt, many of those who have thought about the political relations between temporally distributed actors have emphasized either the *connections* or the *disconnections* between current and future publics. I have tried to emphasize both dimensions in arguing that temporally distributed political relationships are characterized by a tension between dominance and freedom. Current publics have the power to benefit or harm future publics but they do not have the power to enforce compliance. Current publics exercise their power over future publics with immunity but the latter nonetheless possess an inalienable freedom to judge and reject or maintain the projects of the past.

This is an asymmetrical power relationship that is fundamentally different from those that characterize political relations between contemporaries. Even repressive political relations can in principle be reformed to be made reciprocal and symmetrical by increasing the power, autonomy, and influence of the repressed and decreasing the power and influence of the repressors. This is not an option where the dominated do not yet exist and when their influence cannot run backwards in time to rebalance an asymmetrical power relationship (Dunn, 1999a).

These observations raise the following questions: Are there ways to support productive and fair political relations in cases where the conventional democratic solution of giving power and influence to those who have none is an impossibility and not merely a practical difficulty? What would an adequate theory of temporal democracy have to do and what would it look like? In the

last section of this paper, I make an initial attempt to address these questions by exploring the theoretical relationships between deliberative democracy and long-term thinking and acting.

4. What Would a General Theory of Temporal Democracy Look Like?

In the first part of this section, I argue that 'good' deliberative practices that are open, inclusive, and non-coercive, encourage long-term thinking by expanding the time-horizons of those engaged in making political decisions. I argue that deliberative theory both implies and requires long-term thinking and that, furthermore, there are practical dynamics that should encourage long-term thinking where deliberative practices most closely approximate the ideal. Arguments to this effect are well documented in the literature on deliberative democracy and environmental policy (e.g. Dryzek, 1997; Eckersley, 2004; Gundersen, 1995; Johnson, 2007; Mason, 1999; Smith, 2003) but their *general* relevance to other temporal issues is less commonly emphasized.

In the second part of this section I argue that only communicative democratic practices can fulfil the normative and practical demands of coordinating political actors who are distributed in time. Communication helps ensure that the individual actions of contemporaries can be coordinated such that long-term goals or objectives may be achieved. More importantly, communicative action is the only option available when it comes to coordinating the actions of political agents who are distributed in time and who are ultimately free to make their own determinations.

4.1 Deliberation and Long-Term Thinking.

A central claim in deliberative theory is that the practice of deliberation is (or can be) transformative (e.g. Warren, 1992). By speaking and listening to others, deliberants are encouraged to look beyond their own interests and towards the interests of the deliberative group as a whole (e.g. Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). More crucially, where the deliberative group does not (or cannot) include all those who are or are potentially affected by a particular decision, participants in actual deliberations must strive to identify an “idealized we-perspective” in order to approximate an “unlimited communication community” (Habermas, 1993, p. 51).

The association between deliberation and an expanded generalized-interest or we-perspective, is especially relevant to issues or decisions that have long-term potential impacts. On these questions, arguments in deliberative forums must be made with reference to future publics because these publics will be affected by the decisions that are made.⁴ This is a normative stipulation that is contained in Habermas' formulations of his discourse principles: the Universal Moral Principle (U); and the Discourse Principle (D). According to (U):

⁴ I say *will* be affected not *potentially* affected because future publics, as opposed to future individuals, will be affected by decisions that are made by current publics. Adopting a collective orientation that does not attach particularities to generalized future interests, concerns, or publics responds to the problems that Goodin (2007) identifies with respect to who should be included among affected interests. In this case, 'future publics' should be considered to be among those who *will* be affected by decisions even if those decisions will determine the specificities of those future publics when they come to exist.

A norm is valid when the foreseeable consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientation of *each individual* could be *jointly* accepted by *all* concerned without coercion (1998, p. 42).

Notice that the phrase “foreseeable consequences” explicitly builds temporality into Habermas’ formulation of (U). This is an appeal for those engaged in deliberations to think temporally about candidate norms which may or may not be sanctioned, and to take the future impacts of their acceptance or rejection into consideration. The consequences of an action might be near-, medium-, or long-term but the explicit appeal is for participants in deliberations to defend their positions with respect to a validity claim in temporal terms. It is not enough to say that a particular moral dictate is good, proper, or just, for me or for us now; it is also necessary to consider whether or not its application might in principle be acceptable to everyone in all places *and times*.

The formulation of the more limited Discourse Principle (D) also invokes the ‘all affected principle’ and contains similar assumptions of temporality.

D: Just those action norms are valid to which all possibility affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses (1996, p. 107).

In his explanation of the basic terms of the principle (D), Habermas is explicit about his assumptions of temporality and he supplies the missing bit about the foreseeable consequences of action norms. “I understand action norms as *temporally*, socially, and substantively generalized behavioural expectations. I include among ‘those affected’ (or involved) anyone whose interests are touched by the foreseeable consequences of a general practice regulated by the norms at issue” (1996, p. 107 emphasis added).

Although the principles (U) and (D) form a part of what Habermas has, in his later writings, called his theories of moral discourse, the assumptions of temporality and the appeals for long-term thinking apply equally to formulations of his theory of ethical-political discourse. This is because (D) is applicable to all forms of discourse, the pragmatic, ethical-political, and moral. The *kinds* of reasons which are required will be different in each case, as will the reference ‘system’ or group involved in a deliberation. On moral questions it will be necessary to seek norms and justify actions in universal terms; on ethical-political questions it may be sufficient to apply a principle of appropriateness (Habermas, 1996, p. 109). What is important is that *when* decisions have temporal impacts, the reference system or group must be extended to include “all those affected” by the “foreseeable consequences” of a norm, policy, or action. In some cases even policy questions which might appear to require the application of a principle of appropriateness may instead be formulated in universal terms depending on the whether the reference group includes all of humanity (which it will on environmental questions) or a subsection of humanity such as a city, region, nation, or ethnic group.

Notice, as well, that Habermas’ formulations of both (U) and (D) are equivocal with respect to *who* is actually included in deliberative processes. In both cases it is a question of whether candidate norms *could* be accepted by all those affected; it is not a question of whether or not these norms *are* actually sanctioned by those participating in a deliberation. This means that it is always possible for a deliberative group to invalidate a norm (or reject a policy) by persuasively arguing that it might not be assented to by future publics. It also suggests that these formulations of the discourse principles assume a theory of trusteeship representation – a theory that is evidently

necessary where the interests and concerns of those who cannot be present or give direction must still be considered (e.g. Dobson, 1996; Kavka & Warren, 1983; Pitkin, 1967).

The idea that arguments in deliberative forums must be made with reference to future publics has a practical dimension as well as a normative one. The practical dimension involves interactions between the following three dynamics: 1) the role of public reason-giving in shaping deliberative outcomes; 2) the plurality of interests that must be included in legitimate deliberative processes; and 3) the information and learning advantages to be had in deliberative environments. These features of good deliberative processes should help expand the time-horizons of those involved in making collective decisions on temporally complex issues.

The idea that public reason-giving in good deliberative environments might help encourage long-term thinking is based on a claim that is familiar in deliberative theory. This is that public deliberation roots-out and discredits claims that are explicitly self-serving at the expense of others. Elster (1986) articulates this idea in a representative statement: “There are certain arguments that simply cannot be started publicly. In a political debate it is pragmatically impossible to argue that a given solution should be chosen just because it is good for oneself. By the very act of engaging in a public debate – by arguing rather than bargaining – one has ruled out the possibility of invoking such reasons.”

How does this related to long-term thinking and decision-making? The assertion is that under conditions that approximate the ideal of a representative and non-coercive deliberative environment in which participants have equal opportunities to listen and speak, the very act of having to making public justifications of validity claims should encourage participants to expand their time horizons where the temporal dimensions of issues are recognized and made explicit. When deliberating decisions that will have long-term impacts, the relevant group of all those affected includes future publics. Those wishing to make public claims about what *ought* to be done with respect to these temporal decisions face a practical imperative to make their claims acceptable (or at least plausibly acceptable) to both current and future publics. Any claims that are explicitly self-serving with respect to current publics at the expense of future publics are weaker claims than those that seek to balance the interests and concerns of current and future publics because claims of the first type can always be challenged on this basis.

It should be obvious that this outcome is not an inevitability — it is instead a *tendency* of deliberations that are carried out in conditions that approximate the ideal. Of particular importance is the representativeness – or the plurality of included interests – in any deliberative forum in which temporally complex decisions are being made. Representatives of future publics cannot be present in actual deliberations and this means that their interests and concerns must be picked-up, imagined, identified, and articulated by self-appointed representatives from among the members of current publics that are involved in the actual deliberations (see Montanaro, 2008). If these representatives of future publics do not emerge over the course of deliberations, there is no reason to think that deliberative processes will encourage long-term thinking. It is, indeed, possible to imagine a temporally complex issue in which the interests of current publics are diametrically opposed to the anticipated interests of future publics. If this issue is also one of great consequence to the current public (such as the implementation of costly greenhouse gas emissions regulations) there is some danger of the interests of future publics being ignored entirely or dismissed in even

the most ideal deliberative environments. There are, however, features of good deliberative environments that will tend to mitigate against this happening, even where the interests of temporally distributed political actors are seemingly opposed. Representatives of future publics should be more likely to emerge where deliberative forums are inclusive of the full range of interests that exist within the current public. This is because the relevant public is more likely to include the longer-term interests, or even the “life-time transcending interests” (Thompson, 2009) of some members of the current publics. It is plausible that participants with no such interests will be involved in a deliberation and that members of this deliberative forum will be content to justify claims only with respect to their own immediate interests, but this becomes less and less likely as the deliberative environment becomes more and more inclusive of the full range of existing interests – some which will be more long-term than others. It is not hard to imagine closed and unrepresentative negotiations on greenhouse gas emissions ignoring or dismissing the supposed interests of future publics; it is much harder to imagine an inclusive public deliberation on this topic in which the interests and concerns of future publics find no representation at all.

Scholars have also argued that deliberation can help mitigate problems of complexity through processes of information gathering and learning (e.g. Dryzek, 1997; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mansbridge, et al., 2009). Dryzek (1997), for example, argues that environmental issues are characterized by “double complexity” in that they involve interactions between two complex systems – ecosystems on the one hand, and human social and political systems on the other. The crucial difficulty is that our knowledge of these systems is limited and will remain forever incomplete. In addition, these very complexities produce a proliferation of perspectives on any specific environmental issue and this generates increasingly complex environmental discourses. Nonetheless, robust deliberations involving representatives of these various discourses can help decision makers better understand the nature of the problems that exist at the intersections between these complex ecosystems and our social and political systems.

These observations apply to *any* complex issue and have particular relevance to temporal issues which are inherently complex by virtue of being shrouded in uncertainty and generative of unanticipated consequences. As deliberative processes are made more representative of actually or potentially affected publics, opportunities to obtain information about all relevant perspectives and interests will be maximized. These processes of learning and information gathering will better equip deliberants to think beyond their individual perspectives and time-frames. Current publics should, as a consequence, be better able to manage the complexities of time through good deliberative processes by, for example, making more refined assessments about the probable consequences of alternative decisions. By contrast, a select and unrepresentative group will be forced to make decisions on more limited sources of knowledge and the assumptions they make may have limited relevance when applied to those current or future interests that are excluded from the decision making process. The claim is that in a deliberative forum which is representative of a fuller range of relevant interests, decision-makers will have a more complete picture of the probable nature of a wider set of considerations and the individual and collective actions that are likely to arise in response to alternative decisions.

The idea that information and learning can help correct myopic orientations is familiar and well documented in a variety of fields (see e.g. Pierson, 2004). Information derived from deliberative environments is especially useful in reducing the uncertainties inevitably involved in

anticipating the interests, concerns, and actions of current and future political actors because there are few other sources of this values-based information. Deliberation can also help mitigate the complexities of temporally complex issues by creating contexts that enable credible commitments”to be made and trusting relationships to develop. This, in turn, can help reduce the number and variety of unanticipated consequences associated with any particular decision. As Dryzek (1997) argues, understanding others through deliberation helps reveal “realistic analyses of how the future can actually unfold, as opposed to wishful thinking about how it should unfold” (p. 200).

The basic idea is that when decisions have long-term implications or impacts, the extent to which decision-making processes are rendered deliberative should increase the extent to which future publics come to be included in the “idealized we-perspective”. An open process of making justifications of validity claims which makes maintaining self-serving “I-perspectives” difficult should help ensure that good deliberative processes are farsighted when required – that is, when long-term issues are being considered and where far-reaching “foreseeable consequences” are involved.

There is evidence that something like this happens in deliberations on temporally complex issues. Fishkin (1995), for example, has found that participants in Deliberative Polls on resource planning in Texas became increasingly supportive of energy conservation measures and more willing to pay extra for investments in renewable energy sources. Gundersen (1995) reports evidence that even one-on-one ‘deliberations’ can enhance foresight among participants and encourage them to adopt longer-term perspectives on environmental issues. These and similar findings are suggestive but they are not nearly extensive or general enough. Scholars have emphasized and explored the linkages between deliberative democracy and environmental policy (e.g.; Dryzek, 1997; Eckersley, 2004; Gundersen, 1995; Johnson, 2007; Mason, 1999; Smith 2003), but it is important to recognize that these arguments apply with equal force to all temporally complex decisions — such as those involving public pension plans, education spending, deficits, debt accumulation, and many others. If deliberative democracy has something to contribute to the making of farsighted environmental policies (as I believe it does), it also has something to contribute to a general theory of temporal democracy.

4.2 Deliberation and Long-Term Acting.

The previous section examined ‘good’ deliberation as a practical means of encouraging long-term thinking. In the context of a general theory of temporal democracy, long-term thinking is a minimum requirement in fulfilling obligations that flow from the connections between generations and the dominant power positions that current publics occupy with respect to future publics. If these obligations are to be fulfilled some means of coordinating the actions of current and future publics must be found, but these coordination mechanisms must also account for the fact that future publics have no influence over current publics who, in turn, have no power to enforce the compliance of future publics. How can long-term projects or plans be realized under these conditions? I argue that far from being inherently myopic, democratic coordination mechanisms are required for acting over the long-term – precisely because coercion is no longer an option when political actors are separated by long intervals of time.

That communication plays a role in coordinating actions is a commonplace observation. What is less often recognized is that communicative coordination has a temporal dimension that can facilitate long-term acting and underwrite the feasibility of future-oriented collective plans and projects. Pitkin (1981) explores these possibilities in a brief account of the differences between the consequences of individual (aggregative) and collective (deliberative) decision making processes. She examines linkages between, on the one hand, public political action, deliberation, and participation, and on the other hand, our collective ability to direct the future away from the unintended consequences of intersecting private decisions. In the latter condition – in which the social consequences of individual actions are ignored and consequently uncoordinated – our collective future is uncontrolled, or determined by mere “drift and inadvertence”. In the former condition it is possible to forge our individual and collective futures by consciously and knowingly coordinating wills, objectives, and interests. As Pitkin (1981) points out, we “cannot even begin to direct the drift of social forces unless we see those forces truly and deliberate about them in our public forums” (p. 346). Pitkin identifies a relationship between deliberative collective action in the current period and the “long-range and large-scale significance of what we want and are doing” (p. 347). The argument is that deliberation helps ensure that individuals are cognizant of the concerns and interests of others. This makes achieving collective goals feasible but it also helps keep us aware of the social *and* the long-range significance of what we are doing both individually and collectively.

Pitkin's account of deliberative coordination explicitly invokes temporality but it is nevertheless focused on coordinating the actions of contemporaries. We have already considered some of the ways in which deliberation might help encourage long-term thinking *among contemporaries* but these theories do not speak directly to the difficulties of coordinating political actors who are distributed in time. Future publics will be free to do as they please and we cannot force them to coordinate with us to achieve long-term goals or objectives. Nor can we deliberate with them *in real time* because they do not yet exist – we cannot obtain from them commitments based on mutually agreed upon and justified courses of action, reasons, or rationales.

It is nonetheless quite common for current period political actors to conceive of themselves as being in communicative relationships with future generations. This is familiar in constitutional politics – a field in which, more than any other, the dualities at the centre of the relationship between current and future publics have been recognized and emphasized. Constitutional laws, limits – or *rappports* in Montesquieu's terms – can be conceived of as missives to future participants in long-term social and political projects. This orientation is especially evident where constitutions are understood as 'living' documents that seek to guide rather than constrain the actions of future publics. That reasons, rationales, and *rappports* can be, and often are transmitted through time is central to the development of a theory of temporal democracy, and, as before, there are both normative and practical dimensions to this theory. With respect to the normative dimension, future publics are *owed* explanations of the decisions made in the current period precisely because current publics set the conditions in which future publics will make their own decisions. With respect to the practical dimension, communication helps make long-term projects and plans feasible.

The normative obligation to communicate is underpinned, as before, by the all affected interests principle. Johnson (2007), for example, argues that current period political actors have an

obligation to enter into deliberative relations with future generations. Current publics must make the anticipated interests and concerns of future generations explicit by making reference to the long-term impacts of their actions – especially when these involve significant potential long-term risks. She argues that “the idea of discursive democracy provides a way of morally justifying such policies to both existing and future persons. It calls for inclusive, informed, and un-coerced deliberation toward an agreement of both existing and future persons, which can serve as a justificatory basis for such public policies” (p. 69).

Johnson recognizes that deliberations between temporally distributed political actors cannot take place in real time and that ‘agreements’ between current and future persons can only be understood as reasonable expectations that future political actors will come to agree with decisions that were made in the past. Yet if political relationships between current and future publics are not reciprocal in real time, deliberative agreements forged in the current period cannot be used to justify these decisions because the conditions normally required for ‘good’ deliberation will not be met. This problem has been addressed by Heyward (2008) who objects to the idea of inter-temporal deliberative processes on the grounds that analyses like Johnson's (2007) do not pay sufficient attention to the problems raised by Parfit's (1984) Non-Identity Problem. If our decisions affect *who* comes to exist and therefore help determine the opinions, concerns, and interests of future individuals, than using the anticipated consent that we might obtain from these individuals as justificatory criteria is logically incoherent. Heyward recommends a Rawlsian-inspired contractual approach that does not rely on the outcomes of temporally extended deliberations between existing and not-yet-existing individuals.

Yet even if we accept that temporally distributed deliberations cannot form a justificatory basis for current period decisions, justifications for our actions can still be provided to future political actors. This process, which might be called *temporal communicative accountability*, would require current period political actors to explain and justify their decisions with reference to their probable impacts on future publics. This could take form as a legal stipulation in which current period decision-makers would be required to publicly justify their actions to future publics. This would make it more difficult to make decisions in the current period that are demonstrably myopic or evidently self-interested from the perspective of the current generation. If decision makers were legally obliged to be publicly and temporally accountable, opposition critics in a good deliberative environment would be assured opportunities to challenge decisions or explanations that are insufficiently sensitive to the potential needs, interests, or conditions of future publics. Of course, legal stipulations may not be required if the environment where public decisions are made is sufficiently deliberative. In an inclusive deliberative environment where validity claims must be publicly justified, representatives of longer-term interests are likely to emerge when temporal decisions are being made – in which case legal stipulations of this sort would merely function to guarantee that this happens.

Beckman (2008) has addressed similar concerns in an article exploring whether current period actors can legitimately impose democratic constraints on future political actors for the purposes of protecting the natural environment that they will inherit. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether or not it is possible to constrain future political actors – given the inalienable freedom they will come to possess – it is worth examining the parts of Beckman's arguments that relate to the concept of temporal communicative accountability: “Respecting future

people as self-determining persons is to owe them a justification of our actions and decisions, not to protect at all costs the institutions of unconstrained self-determination” (p. 618). Following Rawls (1993) and Scanlon (1998) in adopting a contractualist approach to intergenerational relations, Beckman (2008) also argues that: “The test for the correctness of our actions towards future people should consequently be whether the reasons we provide could reasonably be accepted by them. Standing in a moral relation with others is to recognise the force of legitimate expectations placed on us. The contractualist idea is that the content of these expectations is best captured by imagining what reasons for action others could not reasonably reject” (p. 616). This approach is similar to the argument that Johnson (2007) makes in at least one respect. In both cases the correctness of current period decisions is to be determined by arguing that future persons will come to agree with the decisions that we have made. If we cannot justify our decisions in those terms, different decisions should be made.

The problem with basing decisions on reasons that could not reasonably be rejected is that it unduly constrains current period political actors while at the same time denying the inalienable freedom that future publics will come to possess. Arguments that cannot reasonably be rejected will furnish us with indisputable justifications for certain decisions (such as the protection of the life-sustaining natural systems) but there are a wide range of other decisions that may be justified in the current period but may or may not be accepted by future political actors. Whether or not our decisions will come to be accepted or rejected will depend on a host of factors, some of which we might anticipate but many of which we cannot know in the current period.

There is, then, an important distinction between reasons that could be “reasonably accepted” and those that “cannot be reasonably rejected.” If we owe future publics justifications for our actions that they could not reasonably reject, why would we give them any justifications at all? These will be either obvious or unnecessary. It is, by contrast, crucially important to transmit to future publics justifications for contentious political decisions that may or may not be acceptable to them. We cannot be certain of the impacts, costs, or benefits of any decision or the ways future political actors will interpret our decisions; what we can do is provide explanations to future publics for the decisions that that we make.

This approach is consistent with theories of trusteeship representation. The concept of communicative accountability – or the ‘giving of accounts’ – as developed in theories of trusteeship representation does not require that decisions made by independent representatives be acceptable to all those who will be affected. Indeed, the actions of an independent trustee might run contrary to the expressed or even anticipated opinions or concerns of his or her constituents. In these cases – and indeed in all instances – the trustee retains an obligation to “give an account” of the rationales motivating his or her actions so that these may be either accepted or rejected by those who are represented (Pitkin, 1967). Under these circumstances, representatives retain the independence that is required for them to engage in meaningful deliberations without losing touch with the concerns and interests of the represented. The iterative nature of this process, in which decisions are made and justified and then subsequently assessed, accepted or rejected, is consistent with short-, medium-, and long-term time-scales. Most importantly, the concept of temporal communicative accountability helps encourage long-term thinking among those making decisions in the current period but it does not unduly constrain the actions of current publics or deny the competence and autonomy of future publics.

Those are the normative underpinnings of the concept of temporal communicative accountability but there are also practical considerations that relate to the feasibility of long-term goals, plans, or objectives. Future publics might choose to reject our rationales and abort our projects, but these ruptures will be made less likely if current period political actors strive to balance their concerns and interests with those of the future by making decisions that future publics might reasonably accept. The threat of future ruptures cannot be eliminated but it will be reduced when future publics come to understand the rationales and reasons underpinning decisions that were made in the past. They may come to disagree with those decisions but at least they will have the option of agreeing, identifying with and continuing the plans and projects of the past.

This practical dimension of the concept of temporal communicative accountability – and its connection to deliberative theory more generally – can also be understood with reference to Habermas' (1996) distinction between facticity and validity. Habermas argues that laws are both legally and normatively grounded. Laws, policies, or regulations are coercively imposed and maintained by the threat or imposition of legal sanctions and penalties – this forms the factual component of the law. The normative component, by contrast, cannot be imposed and must instead be forged and preserved by way of persuasion. Discursively grounded laws, policies, or regulations, are predicated on rationales, reasons, or validity claims that can, at any time, be redeemed in order to illustrate and support the legitimacy of the law. If these reasons, rationales, or validity claims are not persuasive, or if they are rejected in deliberative environments that are inclusive of all those affected, the law loses its force of legitimacy. Laws that are not discursively grounded are more vulnerable and unstable because they can only be maintained through comparatively inefficient coercive means.

The normative dimension of laws (or decisions) fulfils an indispensable function in a temporal context where current actors have no power to enforce compliance among future actors. Only the “forceless force of the better argument” can maintain laws over the long-term as future publics come to exercise their inalienable freedom. Thus even though theories of democracy require provisionality – and this introduces endogenous uncertainty into long-term decision making processes that are already severely affected by exogenous uncertainty – discursive practices (such as temporal communicative accountability) can help manage the uncertainties introduced by the inalienable freedom of future publics to do as they please. The articulation of reasons, the justifications of validity claims, and the transportation of these through time, provides some stability by ensuring that rationales that are persuasive and decisive in the current period will be more heavily weighted (even if they are eventually rejected) by future publics. In essence, making long-term policy in the context of generational autonomy requires the legitimizing force of discursively forged rationales and not, specifically, the force of legal sanctions that cannot, in any case, be enforced over time.

This discussion leads back to the question of whether democracy is inherently myopic. Many scholars, especially those concerned with environmental issues, have suggested that there is a tension between democracy and long-termism (e.g. Kim & Dator, 1999; Tonn, 2007; Tonn & Hogan, 2006). Others are more concerned with whether constraining democracy is legitimate when decisions have long-term foreseeable negative impacts (e.g. Beckman, 2008; Wood, 2000). I would like to argue that, far from being myopic, democracy is required if long-term objectives are to be achieved. More specifically, democratic relations *between* temporally distributed actors are

both normatively implied and practically required when current period decisions have long-term impacts.

Some democratic constraints – such as a 'sustainability amendment' designed to constitutionally protect biodiversity (Wood, 2000) – will be legitimate where current period decisions permanently close off future options, but democratic constraints are not sufficient to meet the normative obligations we have to future publics precisely because they are not practically sufficient to achieve long-term objectives. If we wish to achieve long-term goals (such as environmental conservation) we must place ourselves into democratic relations with future publics and convince rather than coerce them to join us in achieving long-term objectives. The destruction of biodiversity is irreversible but the decision to adopt constitutional constraints to protect biodiversity is not. Future publics, at any stage along the procession of coming generations, might revisit, revise, or revoke any such constitutional stipulation.

The upshot of this is that current publics must recognize and acknowledge both the connections and the disconnections between temporally distributed actors. The connections establish normative relations between current and future publics and if the terms of these relations are to be fulfilled and maintained, decisions with long-term impacts must be buttressed by objectives that might plausibly be achieved. Current publics are therefore required, both normatively and practically, to treat future publics as temporally distributed *democratic* agents because future publics will become decisively influential, equal, and competent participants in temporally distributed communities and projects.

Conclusion

The challenges of time are too often neglected in democratic theory and practice. There are at least three reasons why this is a problem. The first is that the majority of our collective decisions – and many of our most intractable political problems – have long-term impacts as well as burdens or benefits that will be unevenly distributed in time. The second is that time has an uneasy relationship with the normative principles underpinning democratic theory. The third is that temporal problems have gained a new level of urgency in recent decades as our collective power to affect, and even in some cases to determine or eliminate the future has increased.

Environmental problems are only the most salient among a larger set of temporally complex issues. As such, many political theorists are especially interested in the relationship between democracy and environmental politics. Some have argued that constraints on electoral democracy may be required if we are to effectively address our most pressing and urgent environmental problems (e.g. Tonn & Hogan, 2006; Wood, 2000). Others believe that more democracy, more broadly conceived, might help expand the time-horizons of current period decision makers and thereby make long-term goals and objectives more feasible both practically and politically (e.g. Mason, 1999; Smith, 2003). I have argued that much of this work is relevant to the development of a general theory of temporal democracy. More specifically, this paper argues that deliberative democracy is better equipped to deal with the complexities of time than is a narrower view of democracy that is primarily concerned with aggregation and electoral incentives.

Furthermore, I have argued that there are both normative and practical reasons for preferring a deliberative approach. From a normative perspective, those who are affected by

current period decisions are, at minimum, owed explanations, even when - or *especially* when – they cannot be involved in making those decisions. This is consistent with the demands of the all affected interest principle. It is also consistent with theories of political accountability and, in particular, the central stipulations of a theory of trusteeship representation. Deliberative democracy and related practices – such as temporal communicative accountability – help account for some of the challenges of time while at the same time preserving certain aspects of these normative democratic principles.

From a practical perspective, *doing politics* in a temporal context requires communications between temporally distributed political actors. These communications are necessarily unidirectional – running, as they do, from the present to the future – but an analysis of the political relationships between temporally distributed actors reveals that these communicative imperatives are indicative of a robust and more complete democratic relationship. The inalienable freedom that is the birth right of all future political actors compels us – both morally and practically – to conceive of them as future democratic agents. Current publics must treat future publics as competent, equal, and decisively influential participants in our shared long-term projects, goals, and objectives.

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