



## The Problem of Democracy

*Alain de Benoist , Tomislav Suni? (Preface)*

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### **The Problem of Democracy** Alain de Benoist , Tomislav Suni? (Preface)

The Problem of Democracy is the first of Alain de Benoist's book-length political works to appear in English. It presents the complexity and depth which underlies all of de Benoist's work and which is often neglected by those who seek to dismiss him by oversimplifying or distorting his arguments. De Benoist shows how democracy is, contrary to what some critics have claimed, something which has been a part of our civilisation from the beginning. The problem, he says, is not the notion of democracy in itself, but rather the current understanding of the term which, instead of empowering the individual, reduces him to little more than a cog in a machine over which he has no control, and in which the direction is set by politicians with little genuine accountability. De Benoist proposes that effective democracy would mean a return to an understanding of citizenship as being tied to one's belonging to a specific political community based on shared values and common historical ties, while doing away with the liberal notion of the delegation of sovereignty to elected representatives. The type of government which is called for is thus a return to the form of government widely understood in Antiquity, but which now seems to us to be a revolutionary notion. This is the first in a series of volumes by Alain de Benoist which will be translated and published by Arktos.

### **The Problem of Democracy Details**

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## From Reader Review The Problem of Democracy for online ebook

### Greg Paulson says

I would recommend The Problem of Democracy despite my disagreeing with the thesis. Alain de Benoist, deconstructs, defines and criticizes modern conceptions of democracy and liberalism, then describes and defines ancient democracy and how it could be applied today (which has to be different given the vast difference in population among other things). One thing I liked a lot was how he addresses many of the criticisms of democracy, mass rule, liberalism etc., even offering many good quotes on the matter. Even though he goes on to defend democracy and attempts to refute the claims of many great thinkers and individuals on the matter (which he fails at badly in my opinion) it is still a good book. It is especially worth it for ammunition when arguing with others in the field of (or interested in) Political Science or in academia in general.

I give it three stars because I do not think it offers a convincing argument for (de Benoist's) democracy, however, since the majority of the book is a critical meditation on the concepts of liberalism and modern democracy (and even arguably de Benoist's), it is still very much worth reading.

As a side note, I must mention the editing was excellent and added a lot to the book. You can tell the editor spent a lot of time perfecting this book. There are numerous clarifying notes concerning things anglophone readers would miss.

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### John Smith says

I agree with Greg's review. I found this book negative, mostly critical, while gently begging the questions whether democracy is good and whether anything is truly better.

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### Tommy says

No matter what an organization claims itself to be practising if it ain't participatory and fraternal it ain't real democracy... and since in this world there exists so many different value systems the species as such can never hope to engage in any democracy beyond a very small scale.

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### Victor says

An eloquently written academic book that criticises, yes, democracy.

The author draws sources from several historical figures that helped philosophise the ideology that we today have all been taught to support, defend and love.

Some very good arguments are made against democracy, including internal contradictions and it's unbalanced relationship with 'liberalism'.

## TR says

The analysis of the concept of democracy here is very thoughtful. I would profit from reading it again. It's his best work available in English, I think.

(but who the hell approved that cover design?!)

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## Joseph says

*This review may contain spoilers, depending how you define spoilers. It's topical.*

Chapters:

- I. The Ancients and the Moderns
- II. A Defence of Democracy
- III. Popular Sovereignty and Pluralism
- IV. The Crisis of Democracy
- V. Towards Organic Democracy
- POSTFACE: Ten Theses on Democracy

In this valuable book, Alain de Benoist lays out a fairly comprehensive look at the arguments around Democracy, in an easily digestible form. Written in 1985, it is striking how familiar the theories sound as I look at the immediate examples that are playing out in 2016. The author presents a history of democracy from its roots in ancient Greece, and draws the lines all the way through to modern times. As he presents four subsequent chapters, comparisons between original and current democracy help frame the readers thinking about why certain elements are problematic, and whether these are inherent issues or things specific to a new market democracy. He looks at a defence of the “cracy” of the “demos” in theory, then discusses the core fundamental of popular sovereignty, and the crisis of how this plays out practically. He closes the book with meaty discussion of a way forward, and a summary of the various observances and theses of democracy.

The book refers constantly to previous writers and seeks to present a holistic view of their writings. De Benoist emphasizes the differences and the agreements between earlier authors, and adds his own valuable insights and conclusions – even when the conclusion is that there is no real resolution to an argument. The Problem of Democracy is absolutely brimming with quotable nuggets – great philosophies and powerful truths. I've highlighted my way through the book like a high-school student with poor studying strategies, or like a hungry caterpillar grabbing at every green leaf. It is a beautiful book. My highlights show the sadness and depravity which the author so eloquently, even beautifully recorded. They show stark realities that certain politicians fail to understand, and that our heroes seem to personify.

### The title problem and the solution:

The author deals with problems of opinion polls, whether they represent choice or even the ability to decide, whether narrow wins are even “democratic”, and the well-known issue of voting for the least worst candidate – with the only more dangerous thing is political apathy, which is *‘a real gift to extremism’*. The book is riddled with problems as much as it is riddled with hopes. His summary problem is that *‘Democracy is ill because citizens are not giving their vote to politicians from whom they expect a concrete course of action reflecting well-defined commitments’*. It's not insurmountable, but it's a pretty big problem.

What is the solution, then? There's the hope of a benevolent dictator, of course. But the author doesn't focus much on that. He looks broadly and finds a few hopeful observations. A few I've already mentioned – breaking silence, participation, referendums – but he also writes that democracy seems to work better in smaller states and republics, like the size of the nation where it was born. In medium and large states, monarchy and despotism seem to dominate, but even there the people can participate – though at greater cost perhaps. Practically, participation is the way of democracy. It's not the best, but it's what we've got.

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## Paul Christensen says

This book seeks to cut through the **quasi-religious tone** surrounding 'democracy' and examine **what the word actually means**.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, **everyone has wanted to be seen as 'democratic'**. Stalin's Constitution of 1936 even proclaimed the USSR a 'democracy'.

**This wasn't always the case**, though, even among leftists. None of the major French revolutionaries used the term, except Robespierre towards the end of the terror (when it didn't do him much good!).

'Democracy' wasn't a household word until Toqueville's 'Democracy in America' (1830s). Before that, writers who believed in 'equality', such as Rousseau, were **admirers of Sparta rather than democratic Athens** (ironically, the man who made Athenian democracy famous through the centuries, Pericles, exercised a quasi-royal authority over his city...)

Athenian democracy, in any case, was very different to the modern beast. It was linked to **tribe** and to **place**, and thus was very much a **blood and soil** ideology. Also, the Athenians saw equality (before the law) as a *means* to democracy, not as something valuable in its own right.

Some thinkers, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, have seen democracy as 'primitive', and monarchy as more highly evolved. Alain de Benoist thinks both views, and 'linear' views in general, are wrong. In ancient Europe, **kings themselves were often elected by popular assembly**. Only in the 1100s were most European monarchies hereditary. The vast majority of historical regimes had **mixed systems of government**.

The **working classes were often anti-democratic**, as in Medici Florence - because the middle class who favoured democracy would give them less rights than the princes did.

Alain de Benoist thinks the best state is the one that gives the best form to the values of a specific people. (By 'people' he means something closer to the French word 'peuple' or the German word 'Volk', i.e. an **ethnic group**).

The modern liberal democracy actually distrusts the folk, but de Benoist on the contrary thinks that where there is no folk and only individuals, there can be no democracy.

In chapter IV, de Benoist gives reasons why 'liberal democracy' or 'formal democracy' (our current system) is indeed a farce.

Among other reasons:

- People elect representatives, but these must delegate their tasks to **unelected officials** (as portrayed in the classic 1980s satire 'Yes Minister').

- Party 'brands' mean that candidates aren't elected for their personal qualities.
- Lukewarm voters are given the same weight as resolute ones.

And so on...

De Benoist's solution is something he calls 'Organic Democracy', involving lots of referenda and plebiscites. This would be folkish, **based on fraternity rather than liberty and equality**, and thus more similar to the ancient Athenian democracy (something he doesn't mention, however, is that the democratic faction in Athens fanatically pursued a ruinous fratricidal war with Sparta, whereas the aristocratic faction wanted peace).

His book was written in 1985, and I think things are too far gone now for de Benoist's folkish democracy to put things right. It could never be implemented under the current system, anyway. The closest equivalent, populism, has had little real success against the entrenched **deep state**.

Something more drastic will be required...

But if the crisis Western Man now faces is overcome, a future system of government will evolve organically, and will doubtless contain mixed elements of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy, just as it has throughout our history.

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## Laura Crockett says

This tome reminds me of *The Feminine Mystique*. Why? Because like Friedan's book, de Benoist's book rolls out the issues superbly. Nonetheless, he doesn't have the answers. I found myself agreeing with the issues, and then disagreeing with what he thinks are the remedies for our excessive ideas on how democracies need to operate.

Read the book to get a grasp of what he suggests are the issues with democracy, equality and the post enlightenment world. If you find yourself agreeing with what he suggests are the problems, then read a few other books that suggest a variety of "fixes."

I will write my own book on what I think needs to be done. But I, like Dugan, will only suggest solutions, based on historical models.