The People's Time: The Multitemporal Justification of Democracy

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Abstract: The idea that democracy is a government *of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people entails that there is no government *by* the people if inclusion is taken out of the equation. This poses a significant challenge to the capacity democracies have to govern beyond the temporal scope of the current *demos*, as members of the people in the past and the future are today voiceless and biteless. This chapter offers a solution to this difficulty by emphasizing that democratic governance is multitemporal insofar as the 'of-by-for' tryptic involves different timescapes: '*of* the people' refers to a cross-temporal dimension of the collective political body that outlasts its individual members; '*by* the people' refers to the practice of self-determination, which is mostly presentist; and '*for* the people' refers to all those individuals who are likely to be affected by a democratic decision, and is mostly future-oriented.

1 Introductory Remarks

Abraham Lincoln's classical formula that democracy is a government *of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people is often accused of being an oversimplified and inaccurate way of portraying democratic regimes. On the one hand, autocratic and populist leaders recurrently claim that they speak for the real people and govern for the people. On the other hand, the idea that the people can govern itself in a sufficiently homogeneous way without the capture of political power by certain elites seems often too optimistic and naïve compared to what happens in the everyday life of representative democracies. Nevertheless, none of the features contained in Lincoln's formula seems dispensable from a reasonable conception of democracy. Democracy means literally that power belongs to the people; this power requires the inclusion and participation of those subject to power at some stage of the procedures by which power is exercised; and a regime that privileges benefits to entities or groups other than the people hardly qualifies as democratic. The delimitation of democratic government depends not only on whose benefit power is to be exercised but chiefly on who is to be included in government and to whom this government is attributed. If any of these three aspects is removed, there seems to be no democracy at all.

The ‘of-by-for’ tryptic expresses three ideals so embedded in contemporary democracies that we grasp the notion almost intuitively. First, it identifies the people as the primary source of legitimate authority, thereby dismissing explanations that resort to the transcendental realm, such as myth, faith or the theological (Canovan 2006, 357)). The people trumps substantive conceptions of justification (e.g., justice, the common good, etc.) because these are too liable to deep disagreement. The people, even if considered an artificial person, a normative concept, or an institutional fact, establishes a sufficient level of unity. Second, the tryptic highlights the importance of self-government for political communities. A people is free if it establishes the laws to which it is subject. Subsequently, citizens are free mainly insofar as they can participate in the making of the political and legal structure to which they are subject as members of the people. Third, the tryptic still offers a valuable clue to distinguishing democracies from non-democratic regimes: government is justified by aiming at the welfare of those subject to power rather than those who exercise power. The three dimensions are cumulative, and none is sufficient to qualify a regime as democratic.

However, the tryptic seems to point to three different capacities of the people. This is particularly striking for determining the nature of the people in a democratic regime in its relation to time, as determining the boundaries of a people involves more than establishing who we are and where we are; it also requires knowing when we are (Cohen 2018, 5). Political power by a people carries a specific temporal modality with it, a ‘chronopower’ (Gudelis 2020):

> Every political regime … carries a temporal dimension in the form of a *temporal regime* … of political power which rests on a particular articulation, interpretation, and representation of time and its imposition over social collective bodies. … [P]olitical entities establish, maintain, and legitimize themselves by means of establishing, imposing, and maintaining a certain temporal regime – the political time of a given political order. (Gudelis 2020, 377)

In the case of democratic power, the different capacities expressed by the ‘of-by-for’ tryptic seem to express different relations with time. This chapter develops this notion and tries to harmonize these differences by maintaining that democratic governance is inherently multitemporal. Section one focuses on the people as the owner of the political structure, section two on the people as a political agent, and section three on the people as subject. All three capacities reveal three different timescapes. In the end, it should be

clear that the people's multitemporal nature requires consistency between all three levels if a democratic government aspires to become genuinely legitimate.

2 Government *of* the People: Power over Time

Democracy is government *of* the people insofar as the exercise of political power over another is justified only in terms imputed to the people. Such terms relate to characteristics that are held by no other entity than the people – it is the people (and the people alone) that holds the essential connection with a particular exercise of power, the connection that allows us to qualify this exercise of power as legitimate (as political, as opposed to bare violence). I call the connection *essential* because the people identifies, qua people, with the exercise of power: Whatever actions or words are expressed in an exercise of power over another qualify as democratic, that is, as pertaining to the people, only if it is possible to claim that they are its own or are attributed to it. The people is, therefore, not only a locus of legitimacy for a given claim to external coercion but also a person in Hobbesian terms: 'A person, is he whose words or actions are considered, either as *his own*, or as representing the words or actions of an other man … to whom *they are attributed*' (Hobbes 1985, 217; my emphasis).

What does it mean to say that one's words or actions are one's own? The expression lies somewhere in between identification and ownership. One is the owner of one's actions and words in the sense that one identifies with them. Hannah Pitkin emphasized that the analogy between being an owner and being an agent hinges on a subtle transition from 'to own' to 'owning up' (Pitkin 1967, 15-28). One is liable to answer for one's actions or words because they belong to one; they are regarded as if parts of one. This relation can occur directly or indirectly – in Hobbes's words, 'truly or by fiction' (Hobbes 1985, 217). In the latter case, ownership relies on representation. For Hobbes, representing another person's words and actions presupposes some consensual agreement whereby the actor (the representative) comes to act by the authority of the author (the represented). In authorizing a representative to act in her name, the author also agrees to own whatever actions are performed in her name, in the sense of taking responsibility for her representative's actions, 'no lesse than if he had made [them] himselfe' (Hobbes 1985, 218). The author is the one who owns actions and their consequences; the actor is the one who performs them under the author's authority.

Government of the people, then, means government *owned* by the people in this sense. Whoever exercises coercion over another or invokes a claim to obedience does so legitimately only if the author/owner of any such exercises or claims is the people.

One way to interpret this statement is to consider that the people is indeed the author of political action if power coincides directly with its will, that is, when any particular class does not capture the political order. The people holds sovereignty as an undivided unit; because of this identification, its power is inalienable and non-transferable. The people then exercises power as a homogeneous totality (an 'entire people' or *ganzen Demos*, in Marx's words) (Marx 1970, 29), conscious of itself, without mediation of any kind. Such a Rousseauian view is typical of populist understandings of democracy – the people exists before its political action, and any attempt to delegate its power corresponds to a break in ownership, to spoliation. Populist leaders claim to speak as 'the true people' in the sense that they incorporate the people in their words or actions (Mudde 2013) – their words or actions are not *attributed to* the people; they are directly *owned* by the people simply because the leader provides the image of being (from) the people.

This interpretation assumes that the people exists independently of political action at any time, including the here and now. However, two significant difficulties arise. First, it is utterly impossible to identify a people independently of its political action, as the latter is an essential characteristic of the former. Otherwise, the outcome of the action by which a people is actualized as a people always seems to be deferred in time. Essentialists and populists will say that a people which already exists can then act at any time, that its power equates with potential, when instead it is only through that same action that the people can become a people in the first place. Without actual political action, a people whose power is merely potential is not a people at all, only a continuously delayed project. How can it exist in the here and now, then, as a people? Second, the idea that the people as a totality can act homogeneously in all areas required by collective governance is not only at odds with practice but also close to impossible. The historical contingencies that may generate a particular people are not independent of the actions by which that people emerges in history, actions which cannot be apolitical. This means the very boundaries that determine who belongs to the people cannot be established without looking at the boundaries that determine who acts with (and as) the people as a totality. The notion that the people can be the author or owner of political action does not necessarily imply that

all its elements act as a homogeneous collective. Instead, the authorship/ownership link can be preserved when political action is performed by certain groups within the people who act in such a way that their actions and words belong to a 'we' that equates with the totality rather than to the group.

How, then, can the people exercise its power in a way that deems it the author and owner of political action? A second interpretation of the statement according to which whoever exercises coercion over another does so legitimately only if the author/owner is the people is that, contrary to the essencialist-populist belief, the people only comes about via the act(s) by which it establishes the conditions of its own exercise of power. Therefore, representation is not only compatible with popular ownership of political action but is also required by it. Sieyes' distinction between constituent and constituted powers best illustrates this view.

According to Sieyes, constituent power is the kind of power that founds and legitimizes a political structure. Even though this power cannot be contained entirely in a constitution, the political structure does not exist without a form by which it identifies itself, and the constitution helps to provide this form. Without it, the political realm does not exist as a unified structure of power that coerces and regulates life in common. For this reason, constituent power is somewhat ambiguous because it can only express itself via an assembly expressly constituted for this purpose – one that requires some element of representation in order to function. On the one hand, constituent power is the constitution's founding element that underlies a people's unity but is to be exercised via representation. Only through the split between the representatives and the represented can the people acquire a political status. This is where the ambiguity lies, as without this split, there would have been no unity in the first place. On the other hand, insofar as the people can give itself any constitutional form whatsoever in the exercise of constituent power, the norms of constituted power always seem contingent, liable to change, the sort of change that endangers the very unity embedded in the idea of the people (Aurélio 2021).

Suppose we did accept the essentialist-populist interpretation of the people (qua holder of constituent power) as an ontologically identifiable entity. It would then have the status of an uncaused cause, something like a metaphysical substratum that merged democratic theory with political theology. Instead, the second interpretation, typical of the so-called constructivist turn in political representation (e.g., Plotke 1997; Mansbridge 2003; Urbinati 2006; Disch 2012) – whereby there is 'no constituency prior to

representation, no people who form an original unity they then delegate onto the derivative representative' (Young 1997, 359), but instead representation generates the identity of the represented qua political agents and brings a constituency and the corresponding interests into being – allows us to think of constituent power as a genuine creative exercise rather than as mere potential that can be actualized. Within this framework, the people is primarily a normative concept that incorporates ambiguity: Its constituent power is pre-constitutional insofar as it cannot but precede the constitution, but it is also constituted insofar as its actions refer necessarily to a 'we' in the name of which it expresses itself.

The gist is that the people, as a totality, does not exist except in the reflex form of this 'we' that constitutes itself through acts carried out by particular persons, acts that are attributed to the people as if it already existed. In this self-constituting action via intermediaries, constituent power cannot exist without constituted powers and vice versa – and both are genuinely legitimate and democratic only if the people ultimately own them.

Democracy is government *of* the people, then, insofar as the people owns any given constitution-making-or-changing procedures (no other entity or organ can claim constitutional power or sovereignty, that is, the power to establish the conditions by which government can exist and be exercised only belongs to the people) and all government action (by constituted powers) is enabled and limited by the very constitution owned by the people, which entails that the people also owns this government action.

By coming into existence in the very actuality of constituent power, the people also carves out a novel timescape, that is, 'a cluster of temporal features' (Adam 2004, 143) that encompass several dimensions (historical, social, economic, political, etc.) and standards of time, including time frames, temporality, timing, tempo, duration, sequence and temporal modalities (past, present, future). As constituent power, government of the people is a form of 'power over time' (Gudelis 2020, 377). According to the essencialist-populist reading, the people is already set in time – it is an actor in history, the existence of which can be pinpointed in calendrical time. However, if this the case, a people conceived as not yet exercising constituent power, that is, as a totality that exists without mediation of any kind, is nothing more than a project and the foundations of a power yet to be. Rather than having the existence at any moment in time that essentialists and populists believe that it has, including the here and now, it only has a future (qua project)

and a past (qua foundation or grounds), not a present. Instead, the constructivist reading makes constituent power the very creative act by which a new model of time perception comes about, a new timescape: democratic time, which is different and not necessarily subject to calendrical time. If there is no people prior to the establishment of the constitutional order, political legitimacy cannot be derived chronologically from a people – rather, its source belongs to an unspecifiable moment in time, unable to be measured in years (Espejo 2015). As Hans Lindhal so pertinently maintains, the historical time of a collective is 'irreducible to dated time' (Lindhal 2009, 149). In line with the ambiguity that is characteristic of the ownership relation expressed in the exercise of constituent power, the people is mostly *present* in action, and it incorporates a *past* that was never present and projects itself onto a *future* that will never become present (Lindhal 2008, 20).

Standard accounts of the establishment of constitutional orders typically employ timescapes involving single-moment fixed deadlines: a city is founded, a state is formed, a constitution comes into force on a single date (expressed in days, months or years) in which one moment in calendrical time functions as a boundary beyond which power comes into existence and behind which there is nothing but bare violence (Cohen 2018, 6). However, single-moment timescapes are incompatible with the constructivist reading, as there is no people at that single moment that can draw the temporal boundary and, hence, no democratic legitimacy is possible. By referring to linear, calendrical time, this timescape is a form of John M.E. McTaggart's A-series of time: When the moment *x* (the constitutive moment) is identified as present, all previous moments are in the past and all succeeding moments are in the future (McTaggart 1927, 9). This past-present-future series cannot provide the conceptual frame of reference to explain the exercise of constituent power, as there is never a present moment in which an existing people has a past and draws a boundary for the future.

Rather, the exercise of constituent power must be understood in light of McTaggart's B-series. Like the A-series, the B-series also involves a separation of times – not between past, present and future, but between 'earlier than' and 'later than'. The A-series determines temporal positions as transitory, whereas the B-series determines them as permanent (McTaggart 1927, 10-31). In the B-series, there is no necessary flow between events that exist on the same temporal line, such that they can all be said to exist equally in relation to some other event. In the case of constituent power, the people arises

with the establishment of constituted powers. Constituent power is, therefore, earlier than constituted powers, which in turn are later than constituent powers, according to the B-series, even if both can coexist simultaneously at any period of the A-series. Constituent power, the characteristic mark of ownership by the people of any (democratic) political order, is thus prior to constituted power in the sense that it is its presupposition, its *a priori* instrument of justification and limitation.

Hence, the people, which only becomes so when exercising the constituent power that structures the exercise of a constituted power, can never genuinely be what Richard Tuck termed 'a sleeping sovereign' (Tuck 2016). When sleeping (before or) after the establishment of the constitutional order, the people rests as if frozen in time, exempt from existing as a people in the concrete reality of democratic government, only waking up from time to time for constitutional revisions that establish different constitutional cycles (Balkin 2020). Such an analogy with sleep applies only to the A-series. On the contrary, because the people's constituent power requires constituted powers in order for the people to exist in the first place, its timescape as the owner of any democratic politics is intrinsically connected with the timescape of the constituted powers. The people is then 'a stirring sovereign' (Walker 2019) whose temporal presence accompanies that of the constituted powers, even if it always remains 'earlier than' them.

3 Government *by* the People: Power by Time

Democracy is government *by* the people insofar as the exercise of political power over another consists in the actuality whereby the people acts. The emphasis here lies not on ownership or authority but on praxis. The only way by which a people is more than merely subjected to the political authority of another (a condition which is common to any single political regime) is by taking over the government, by acting. The people, which seems to occupy the default position of being ruled, becomes the ruler not by name or wishful thinking but by actually ruling. Democracy is then the implementation in a collective or community of the ideal of self-government, according to which, much like the modern idea of individual autonomy, a people is sovereign and free only if it is capable of governing itself, that is, of being coerced by no other entity but itself and of obeying no other laws but those which it establishes for itself.

Whereas government of the people entails associating the status of 'owner' with the people, government by the people entails recognizing the people as a 'political agent'. If the people does not engage in the actions by which power is exercised, it cannot be said 'to govern' or 'to rule', and there is no democracy, which is nothing more than the people ruling itself (Skinner 1973, 299). Representation carries far less weight in this capacity than alternative forms of non-mediated rule, such as direct or deliberative democracy, insofar as, by definition, it consists of someone acting for the people and in the name of the people. Representation implies an insuperable existential gap between the representatives and the represented, and from this arises an ambiguity by which is made present that which is also absent. However, praxis has no room for absenteeism. It requires actuality, the people always being present. This helps to explain why democracy was at odds with representation, and vice versa, for so many centuries until the idea of representative democracy tried to reconcile the two by relying on participation platforms that equated as much as possible with the class of the represented, such as franchise enlargement or universal suffrage (Manin 1997). In fact, the early founders of what we call today 'representative democracies' hardly thought of such structures of rule as democracies at all (Dunn 2005) precisely because they prioritized representation and republican forms of government to actual participation in political decision-making of those who were to be the addressees of such political decisions. The upshot is that there is no democracy, with or without representative structures of rule, without such actual participation being made effective.

For the essencialist-populist view of the people, this poses no significant problems. Any collective manifestation of political action inside or outside the state structure that is neither expressed nor captured by an elite holds the potential to qualify as popular power, whether in the form of social movements, plebeian experiences (Breaugh 2013), or organized suffrage. The same cannot be said of the constructivist view, though. Insofar as the people can act only when it comes to exist in the first place, and no existence is possible prior to the establishment of political structures of rule, it follows that the people can only govern itself within the framework of an existing structure of constituted powers.

Pasquale Pasquino (2019) is probably who best describes the framework within which this difficulty arises by maintaining that the people, like Ernst Kantorowicz's view on medieval kings, has two bodies: one as a constituted power via which political

participation takes place (even in constitutional-authorizing procedures); and another as a constituent power that sets a limit to the exercise of political power by any authority, thus preventing constituted powers from acquiring absolute authority. The limiting factor is independent of participation or action, which is typical of the people qua constituted power. For instance, in line with Sieyes' theory that is so influential over Pasquino's work, the making of a constitution requires an assembly that provides unity to the actual holder of constituent power – when the assembly decides on a particular set of institutions, it is not the actual people that is deciding but rather the representatives of the people that arises from such representation. And if the constitutional text becomes binding only if the people votes in its favour, thereby ratifying it, the franchise that so participates is not the people qua holder of constituent power but rather one of the forms of constituted powers. Insofar as the people is said to participate in any stage of a decision-making process that is regulated by procedural rules, whether such participation consists of electing representatives or providing necessary input to the vagaries of ordinary politics, the political action that ensues is attributed to the people qua constituted power, not qua constituent power.

What follows from this distinction in temporal terms is that the people's self-government does not have the same capacity to found a novel timescape when compared to the people's ownership of a political structure. Action takes place in moments already framed by a particular timescape. The procedural rules of participation whereby the people comes to exist as a political agent contain temporal elements that are independent of the very action in which the people is engaging, whether such elements are countdown, recurring or fixed deadlines. In this sense, government by the people is a series of actions developed within existing institutions (e.g., the franchise, caucuses, institutional platforms for group or individual contestation) that function as proxies for the people that owns the political process in the first place – actions that are situated in a given moment in time determined by the temporal timeframe that is specific to the institutions in which they take place (e.g., the election cycle, the deliberative deadline, etc.). More than power over time, it is 'power by time' (Gudelis 2020), that is, via a pre-established temporal framework. The upshot is that the timescape of constituent power is not the same as the timescape of constituted power, although both can be mutually consistent. Government by the people is, therefore, consistent with McTaggart's A-series.

Of course, power by time is popular in the sense that there is such a thing as a people capable of acting for itself without some sort of mediation and of producing, in that capacity, decisions that correspond (or bear any relation of proximity) to the preferences of those who comprise the people – that is, such a thing as a people capable of ruling, and of ruling itself, no less. This assumption is far from clear. When the people qua constituted power is said to govern, its decisions result from the aggregation of several group or individual actions through which participation is made effective. The people, one single entity, makes one decision, and this correspondence ('one people-one decision') forms the paradigm case of ruling: One people makes one decision that binds itself. However, if we assume that self-government relies exclusively on proximity between individual preferences and collective decisions (Riker 1972), such a homogeneous paradigm never obtains in practice.

Participation through the expression of preferences, attitudes, and values is always too heterogeneous to provide sufficient consensus around one single decision, as Arrow's theorem famously underlines. Moreover, procedural rules that help to overcome this gap between too much heterogeneity and homogeneity, such as majority rule, hardly provide a definitive response to complete homogeneity, as they remain overly demanding in procedural terms (since they require unanimity or something resembling it in order to escape the accusation of being too heterogeneous) and they entail that ultimately some members of the people do have to live under decisions they disapprove because others prefer these decisions (Przeworski 2010, 31-32). Simply put, the idea that a people can govern itself by the operation of aggregating sufficient individual preferences that turn (almost magically) heterogeneity into a homogeneous people seems too high a threshold to achieve.

The problem here lies in the belief that government by the people consists only of proximity between individual preferences and collective decisions. This difficulty follows from considering that the path from the expression of multiple individual preferences towards one collective decision is made of a statistical device that applies a previously held procedural rule. In light of this consideration, 'government by the people' can only be made possible if we understand the expression to mean 'government by most of the people', at least if we apply the majority rule as the standard form of aggregating individual preferences. Such a kind of political action is merely statistical. However, as Ronald Dworkin maintains, collective action can also be regarded as communal:

> Collective action is statistical when what the group does is only a matter of some function, rough or specific, of what the individual members of the group do on their own, that is, with no sense of doing something *as* a group. … Collective action is communal, however, when it cannot be reduced just to some statistical function of individual action, when it presupposes a special, distinct, collective *agency*. It is a matter of individuals acting together in a way that merges their separate actions into a further, unified, act that is together *theirs*. (Dworkin 1996, 19-20)

According to this communal conception of democracy, political decisions are made by an entity distinct from individuals considered separately: the people as a political unit that does not result from the sum of the individuals composing it. Collective action implies that participants simultaneously establish a composite unit of responsibility, the status of which is affected by the success or failure of the action, and also a composite unit of judgment whose convictions concerning the just and the good are suitable to formulate a judgment about that action. A constitution underlying the communal version of democracy must, therefore, include institutions and values that privilege and reinforce these two attitudes: collective responsibility and individual judgment.

The difference between both kinds of collective action bears differently on how the people exercises power in a way that can be considered self-government within certain temporal frameworks. The statistical collective action entirely depends on what is considered relevant expressed preferences when the statistical counting takes place. Actuality requires, then, two moments very close in time: the (more or less extended) moment when each member of the people expresses his or her preferences and the succeeding moment in which these preferences are counted in light of a previously established statistical norm (e.g., majority rule). Both moments can refer to different time horizons (e.g., an individual voter may have long-term preferences, as opposed to an individual voter who has short-term preferences; the rule of the majority can apply to preferences expressed on that same day or two months ago). Nevertheless, both moments privilege the present in light of the A-series of time: what counts as an individual preference for statistical terms is the preference that is considered so at the (present) moment in which the majority rule is to be applied. The decision attributed to the collective is a sort of snapshot of the overall expressions of preferences. Government by the people in this sense is, therefore, strictly presentist.

The communal collective action has a looser connection with the present, though. In communal collective action, individual members of the people do not simply participate in a collective endeavour by expressing what their preferences are at that precise moment in time. Instead, they transmit their political judgement on what the good for their community is or should be. Homogeneity does not follow from a subsequent moment in which a statistical rule is applied – it is already somehow presupposed in each individual judgement. This judgement requires expressing a sense of community by an individual action: the action of participation. But in each of these actions, the people is already actual; it is neither memory nor potential. It is mostly present, neither past nor future. However, such a present expression of a communal endeavour is no longer simply contained by the temporal boundaries of the two moments that comprise the statistical measurement of a collective decision (e.g., voting and counting results). Insofar as political judgement already refers to the community rather than the individual, the temporal spectrum of the moment when the people decides as a whole seems broader than the immediate now in which each political judgement is expressed. It encompasses the expected life span of the entire people.

4 Government *for* the People: Power across Time

The communal conception of the people paves the way for a different dimension of popular rule besides ownership and agency: the notion that the people is the main subject or addressee of political action. Government *for* the people means that the exercise of political power over another is instrumental towards benefitting this other insofar as this other is the people. These benefits are often considered to correspond to what members of the people want from their government, as a consequence of self-government. Governing for the people entails, then, that whoever governs must do so under the normative constraints of maximizing the good of the people qua subject of such governance, and this good is measured in terms of what citizens believe to be good for them.

This is not a particularly helpful criterion of democracy. Rulers of any political regime, including authoritarian ones, invariably claim that they govern at the bequest or in view of the people's good. The people is always a subject in any regime, regardless of being the owner or the primary agent of political action. This suggests that governance

aimed at benefiting the people is an insufficient criterion of democratic rule. Still, what ultimately justifies exercising power for the people is that the people exists and can thrive under that power. Even though governing for the people is an insufficient criterion of democratic rule, it is a necessary one.

However, what does it mean to say that democracies must govern in view of the people's good? It certainly cannot mean that paternalist forms of governance, whereby rulers act in accordance solely with their strict interpretation of what the good for the people is, can define democratic governance, as such forms would be inconsistent with the idea of self-government. In order to generate democratic rule, the connection between self-determination (the people as agent) and the search for the good of the people (the people as subject) cannot be severed. This connection is justified by the conviction that the people can and should govern itself because it knows best what is best for itself. Any representative action that is likely to take place as an exercise of constituted powers should preserve this connection and be responsive to what the people believes is best for itself.

This view is highly problematic, though. Those who exercise constituted powers typically serve two functions: representing, which presupposes voicing the people's opinions in decision-making processes, and governing in a manner consistent and in accordance with accepted procedural norms and practices. The first equates to responsiveness, whereas the second is under responsibility requirements. When they conflict, we come across what Giovanni Sartori (1976, 18-24) called 'the responsive-responsible dilemma' (Mair 2013), according to which there is a difficulty in combining the institutional duties of government (especially in conditions of international economic and legal integration, not to mention in light of specific moral requirements attached to liberal democracies) with the act of mirroring or responding to the people's preferences and expectations. The idea behind the dilemma is that there is no democracy if the operation of government dismisses either of these two components.

The dilemma affects the people's temporal landscape. Governing in terms of responsiveness implies listening to the people's voice at the moment such voice is actualized. Whatever the members of the people believe to be good for them as a unitary whole at one specific moment in time corresponds necessarily to the contents of the good that democratic rule must pursue if it is to govern for the people. The temporal range of decision-making is overwhelmingly presentist. Governing in terms of responsibility,

however, implies exercising power in a way that privileges normative commitments, the validity of which is independent of what the people has to say about them. This means the temporal range of decision-making can be far broader, as responsibility can entail privileging obedience to principles derived from the past (and perhaps a distant past) or conceptions of the common good projected onto the (far) future.

However, this difficulty is only apparent. In fact, not all kinds of responsiveness are presentist. Some still preserve the connection between self-determination and the search for the people's good. On the one hand, some seem necessarily presentist. 'Issue congruence' refers to the similarity between the representatives' claims and behaviours and the represented's preferences, whether the latter are expressed or presumed. 'Ideology congruence' refers to the similarity between the positions the represented assume in the left-right political spectrum and the policies that parties, governments and legislature attach to different points in that spectrum. And 'descriptive representation' (Pitkin 1967, 60-91), which can be regarded as a particular kind of responsiveness insofar as it consists of a similarity between the represented and the corresponding representatives, refers to the similarity between certain features of the representatives and social groups whose members identify as members of those social groups precisely because they have the same shared features. All these forms seem dependent on attending to the present snapshot of what the people believes and is at a specific moment in time.

On the other hand, responsiveness can have a less present-moment dependency. It can also refer to the similarity between the claims and actions of representatives and the objective interests of the represented (Campos 2024), which are understood not as actual or presumed preferences that the represented actually have but as interests that pertain to the represented's moral and political status (as interests they should have and that function, then, as normative criteria for acting for the sake of the represented). Responsiveness to objective interests, from an objective viewpoint, is strictly normative and empirically assessed. It operates at the level of justification.

The idea that preferences and interests can be distinguished is not new to the literature on representation. Jane Mansbridge (2003, 517), for instance, understands interests specifically as 'enlightened preferences', that is, as encompassing 'identity-constituting, ideal-regarding commitments as well as material needs'. However, even if objective interests can accommodate these characteristics, they should be understood as independent of preferences. This stronger separation is more akin to the distinction

between ‘seeing a reason’ and ‘having a reason’ – a reason consisting in the way specific facts count in favour of possibilities of thought and action a person has, although sometimes one is not in a position to see them (Larmore 2008, 47-64).

To have an objective interest is to have objective reasons to want something. Statements about persons’ having an interest in some *x* depend not on whether the interested parties actually want, value or need *x* but on whether such statements express justifications that those interest-holders would endorse in ideal conditions of reasonableness and information, mainly concerning policy issues and the corresponding procedures and eventual outcomes. The interest attached to a person *A*’s value is constituted by the reasons for favouring or disfavouring a state of affairs related to *A* for the sake of *A*. When someone’s preferences constitute a reason for one to act, one has a reason to act for that person’s sake. This seems to be the rationale behind the traditional form of ideology or issue congruence. However, these reasons do not necessarily constitute the entirety of the person’s interests, nor do they exhaust the demand for responsiveness. Objective reasons that may be independent of preferences can also be the object of responsiveness.

The upshot is that the dilemma between representation and responsiveness may often be only apparent, as acting responsibly may be justified simply as responsiveness to objective interests rather than preferences or identities. This suggests that the difference in temporal landscapes is also apparent. Objective interests can be objective interests in the future (Campos 2024, 116-126), that is, interests that members of the people in the present have regarding their conditions qua members of the people throughout their future expected lifespan, or even perhaps ‘lifetime-transcending interests’ (Thompson 2009). Objective interests have a temporal range closer to the communal conception of collective action. They allow us to think of the people, at least qua subject or addressee of democratic rule, with a present that extends throughout several decades at each stage of any collective decision-making process. In a sort of reshaping of McTaggart’s A-series according to which the distinction past-present-future merges into a broader conception of the present, government for the people implies governing in view of the extended present towards the future.

5 Concluding Remarks

Political legitimacy requires that any exercise of power by one entity over another must be in some sense justified (or justifiable) by the one who exercises that power vis-à-vis the one who is subject to the power being exercised. The absence of such a justification entails that the power relation boils down to mere coercion or violence. In democratic environments, this justification involves the people in at least three different capacities: as the owner of the power relation, the primary agent of political power, and the main subject in benefit of whom power is to be exercised. Lincoln's classical formula that democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people mirrors these different capacities. Political regimes require all three in order to qualify as democratic.

However, the three capacities entail three different relations with time. As the owner of the power relation, the people holds constituent power that generates a political order which is also a temporal order. The fixed moments, deadlines or time horizons typical of the political order form the temporal order of the constituted powers which the people requires in order to exist qua holder of constituent power in the first place. The status of ownership incorporates, then, a capacity to build a temporal order almost from scratch. As the agent of political power, the people actualizes itself in the political order it builds for itself within the boundaries of the temporal order it had constituted for itself. In this sense, the people rules and implements the value of self-determination by acting in accordance with the features of that specific temporal order. We can say that it acts at that moment as a constituted power, the presence of which can be pinpointed in historical time. As the subject or beneficiary or power, in turn, the people is comprised of members that have interests extending beyond the present moment – the temporal order that is genuinely democratic is characterized by a present that extends far onto the future. In short, ownership builds a timescape; agency occurs within an established timescape; subjection has a communal time horizon. Multitemporality is embedded in the very nature of the people that justifies political power as democratic.

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