

Participation and Democratic Theory: Reworking the Premises for a Participatory Society*

WILLIAM LAFFERTY
Institute for Social Research, Oslo

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1. Elitist versus Participatory Democracy

Pateman addresses herself critically to the 'theory of democratic elitism' and offers her own recommendations for an alternative model and theory of a 'participatory society.' Her treatment of the elitist theory is based mainly on the works of Schumpeter, Berelson, Sartori, Dahl, and Eckstein. Briefly, this theory can be described as the response of liberal social scientists to two sets of circumstances which developed in the decades immediately preceding and following World War II. First, there was the spread and threat of totalitarian regimes and totalitarian ideas and, second, there was the rather shocking realization that the 'people,' when finally asked in sample surveys, gave no indication of being the type of 'common man' upon which liberal democrats had always assumed that democracy safely rested. With threat from without and disillusionment from within, the group of theorists in question set about making both theory and practice safe for democracy or, if you will, to protect democracy from the double dangers of Utopian cynicism and subversion from below.

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comply with the liberalist standards of the cold-war era. The major planks of this new democratic platform were as follows:

(1) The masses of democratic citizens are in fact anything but democratic, showing instead strong latent tendencies toward authoritarianism, which occasionally break out in active support of the likes of a Hitler, a Mussolini, or a Joe McCarthy.

(2) The spirit of democracy, and the source of the values and inspiration necessary to sustain it, do not rest, therefore, with the common man but rather with popular elites, who, for one reason or another, have proved their ability to rule in the name of the people.

(3) The mandate thus rendered is, and *should* be, endorsed in a mutual process whereby elites formulate alternative courses of action for periodic approval or disapproval by an informed electorate. Voting between a pluralism of interest options is the citizen's major function, and the carrying out of these options in a 'responsible' manner is the elite's (representative's) major duty.

(4) Participation beyond voting is not really necessary for the average man as long as access to elite positions is open to all, so that those who *will* get more deeply involved in politics have the opportunity. Furthermore, most citizen interests are doubly taken care of through interest groups which manage to exert influence on the decision-making process between public elections. This provides the desirable situation of a maximum of interest 'output' with a minimum of citizen 'input'.

(5) These various aspects of an updated theory of democracy serve to preserve one of the most vital features of the democratic system, i.e., its *stability*. History has shown – for example in Athens, the Weimar Republic, and, more recently, on university campuses – that excessive participation is often the forerunner of chaos. In an age of demagogues and irrational needs, a viable democracy requires as many institutional safeguards as possible.

(6) Even if one does not accept any of the above arguments, it should be clear to all that advanced techno-industrial societies simply cannot *afford* excessive levels of participation if they are to function with a reasonable amount of efficiency. The sufferings inflicted upon the populace through a breakdown in the decision-making processes of these systems would be much more severe than any benefits gained by increased participation. Besides, there is a large body of evidence which shows that the majority of people in industrial societies don't *like* to participate anyway; that they would rather devote their time to family and recreation. In short, images of the Greek polis and the New England town meeting are both undesirable and unrealistic for modern industrial democracies.

These points by no means cover all of the subtleties or ramifications of the 'contemporary' theory of democracy (Pateman's term), but they serve to give the general drift of the argument.² Pateman's answer to these views does not take the form of a direct refutation, but is rather based on an attempt to formulate a stronger argument *for* a participatory society.

She starts off by showing that the so-called 'classical' theory of democracy

against which the contemporary theorists rail, is, in fact, a myth. She shows first, that few of the elitist theorists actually specify to whom they are referring when they use the term 'classical' theory, and, second, that the theories they do attack are actually straw men having little to do with those theories which *might* reasonably be associated with the notion of genuine participatory democracy. Going to the classical theorists themselves, Pateman shows that, Schumpeter at any rate – and she sees him as the tone setter – has totally missed the fact that there are not one but at least *two* theories implicit in their works and, further, that Schumpeter's attack hits *neither* of them.³

The theories of the elder Mill, Bentham, and Locke did call for universal participation, but only as a limited 'protective function' of other, *more important*, institutional arrangements. There was nothing 'unrealistic' to attack in these ideas, since they were, after all, quite similar to the emphasis on *representative* democracy that the contemporary theorists themselves have arrived at. Other classical theorists, such as the younger Mill and Rousseau, *did* put forth notions of a truly participatory society, but these are notions that the contemporary theorists are either unaware of or systematically not interested in. It is from these theorists, along with G. D. H. Cole, that Pateman derives the key ideas for her own theory of a participatory society.

Her point of departure is Rousseau's ideal participatory system as stated in the *Social Contract*. In highly capsulized form, the internal logic of this system states that if all participate in such a manner as to impose only those conditions on each other which they would want imposed upon themselves, they will then have operationalized a 'general will' which serves both individual and group well-being. By submitting his personal interests to those of the group, and assuming that other members do likewise on an equal basis, the individual participant contributes to an increase of freedom for all, since each is then free from encroachments by the others at the same time that each member's control is increased *through* the greater efficiency of group cooperation. It is from this general argument that Pateman derives the first major proposition of her scheme, which she summarizes as the idea that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals, and . . . 'that the major function of participation is an educative one'.⁴

The second major proposition is taken from G. D. H. Cole, who, for Pateman, is the participatory theorist most relevant for modern industrial society. Cole extends many of Rousseau's ideas to the highly differentiated labor structure resulting from industrialization, stressing the notion of a 'complex of associations held together by the wills of their members'. These associations arise in relation to the *functions* which each carries out, and it is a form of functional representation which Cole stresses as the core of democracy in the modern era. This system of functional representation implies 'the constant participation of the ordinary man in the conduct of those parts of the structure of society with which he is directly concerned, and which he has therefore the best chance of understanding'.⁵

Cole thus makes explicit an idea which was originally put forth by John Stuart Mill, i.e., that the 'democratic principle' both can and should be applied to

spheres of social action other than those considered strictly 'political'. It is in areas such as the industrial workplace that basic questions of superiority and subordination are crucial, and they should therefore be considered as optimal settings for the educative effects of participation. Furthermore, since economic inequality lies at the basis of political inequality, the only way to attain conditions of equal participation in the political system is by demanding equal participation in the functional-economic system.

Pateman sums up her two major propositions as follows:

The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialization, or 'social training', for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an educative one, educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures.

The second aspect of the theory of participatory democracy is that spheres such as industry should be seen as political systems in their own right, offering areas of participation additional to the national level. If individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas must be so organized that they can participate in decision making. A further reason for the central place of industry in the theory relates to the substantive measure of economic equality required to give the individual the independence and security necessary for (equal) participation; the democratizing of industrial authority structures, abolishing the permanent distinction between 'managers' and 'men' would mean a large step toward meeting this condition.⁶

These two ideas, which Pateman calls the *educative function of participation* and the *crucial role of industry*, are to be regarded as hypotheses upon which the theory of participatory democracy 'stands or falls'. The remainder of Pateman's book is devoted to secondary analyses of the literature in search of support for these two major ideas. Briefly, she finds considerable evidence for the posited relationship between increased participation and increased feelings of political efficiency and personal well-being. The idea that industrial participation *per se* is an effective means of political education is more difficult to establish, however, since, as she points out, there are so few cases where full participation has been effectively implemented on both higher and lower levels of decision making. Those cases which do exist, however, such as the system of industrial democracy in Yugoslavia, seem to point in the proper direction and, in general, she feels that 'the evidence shows no obvious, serious impediments to economic efficiency that would call into question the whole idea of industrial democracy'.⁷

Pateman's plea for a participatory society is thus based on the two related ideas: (1) that participation in decision making is *per se* good and necessary for both individuals and society, and (2) that industrial participation is an especially fruitful area for educating responsible and critical citizens. In the following section, I want to look briefly at Pateman's premises for these hypotheses and then go on to the development of a complementary approach.

2. Power and Participation

The core of Pateman's argument seems to be a tautological proposition, derived from Rousseau, to the effect that a good system of participatory democracy is dependent on a certain type of participatory personality, and that this type of personality is best developed within a properly functioning participatory system. On the input side of this tautology is the premise as to *equality* in decision-making power, and on the output side is the production of more politically effective individuals who then go on to spread the demands of greater participation to other subsystems of the total system. One need not be a supporter of 'contemporary' democratic theory to see the problem inherent in this formulation. If equality in power is necessary for meaningful participation and if, further, it is obvious to all that equality of power does not exist in any of the present-day democracies, is it not also obvious that Pateman's propositions *are* hopelessly Utopian?

Well, yes and no. Yes, in that Pateman herself stresses the prescriptive nature of her ideas *in the face of* the lack of power equality; no, in that her plea for the expansion of 'the political' to cover industrial and other nonelectoral structures is meant as a definite technique for the *correction* of the unequal distribution of power. Pateman, like Bachrach, stresses the goal of a participatory society as *both* end and means.⁸ Both authors refuse to allow their theorizing to be unduly affected by 'what is', because they are convinced that the more depressing aspects of current democratic practices – citizen apathy, ritualism, and political alienation – are largely a result of structures and legitimations arising from a combination of social injustice and contemporary democratic theory itself. The goal is, therefore, to attack social injustice and the unequal distribution of power *through* participation.

This perspective gives rise to its own set of problems, however. First, if the conditions of Rousseau's system are not present in contemporary democracies, how are we to argue for participation without in reality arguing for power? Why, that is, must participation *per se* take precedence over interest-group tactics? Second, if it is really the act of participation itself which is so essential, just what *are* the characteristics of this act which make participation work in the direction posited by Pateman? What is the psychological nature of the 'educative effect' and how does it actually work?

In what follows, I will try to answer both of these questions by building up an argument for participation along lines quite different from Pateman's approach.

Instead of relying on premises at the level of the social system – such as equality of power – I will try to build up a case based on a normative model of individual needs. It is a model which reduces the question of need to a simple requirement for organismic action and then shows how this requirement must be met by the sociocultural system if the notion of ‘human’ is to be maximally preserved and engendered. I believe that it is a model which not only makes certain forms of participation mandatory for personal growth, but which, through its own dynamic, also serves to bring forth to both group and individual consciousness the bases of power underlying group interaction. It is thus a model for both political participation and political consciousness, with the latter being offered here as both the major result of Pateman’s educative effect and the major reason, in and of itself, for maximizing participation in democratic systems.

3. Action and Meaning

The model to be proposed is derived from Ernest Becker’s ‘full field theory of alienation.’⁹ Becker’s project has been to construct a theory of alienation and social injustice based on the idea of what it is to be human. Drawing on material from philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, and history, he builds up an integrated and logically consistent ‘theory of the nature of the social bond’ which, by its scope of synthesis alone, poses a unique challenge to the current state of specialized social science. His goal is nothing less than the attempt ‘to show the dependence of private troubles on social issues’, and he avoids no discipline or theorist who seems to shed light on the task. The result is a perspective on the human condition which is so rich, variegated, and complex that it is impossible to apply more than certain relevant key aspects to any one problem. The following presentation is, therefore, mainly my own synthesis of Becker in relation to the problem of participation and by no means does justice to the full scope of his ideas.¹⁰

Organismic Action

As an initial simplification, it can be said that Becker’s scheme builds upon six basic elements: *action, objects, anxiety, self-esteem, symbols, and meaning*. All organisms have *to act*. They must move forward through their environments under their own biological impetus or they are not organisms. For an organism to be hindered in its mode of action is to die, to cease being. But action alone is not enough to define life. Organisms must act within specific environments which contain the minimum of *objects* necessary for the progression of an epigenetic growth cycle. Organisms thus have specific modes of ‘reactivity’ which determine the range of objects with which they can successfully ‘interact’, and these object-action ranges make up the experiential field of the organism. Within the unlimited potential range of objects there will always exist for each organism some objects which sustain and promote growth and some which stunt and hinder growth.

Interactions with objects of the former type can be said to be accompanied by a general warm feeling of the 'rightness' of organismic development, while interactions with objects of the latter type can be said to be accompanied by feelings of danger and impending nonbeing. The organismic experience of the first feeling can be called *self-esteem*, while the experience of the second feeling can be called *anxiety*.

Everything said up to this point applies equally well to both animals and humans; everything, that is, except the application of the term *self-esteem* to the warm feeling of successful, forward-moving action. Without quibbling over semantics, it can be said that it is the existence of a *linguistic self-system* which truly differentiates man from the higher primates. Due to the combination of a prolonged state of infant dependency and the evolution of a large brain, the human infant is the only neonate which cognitively objectifies its own body *before* it knows what to do with it. For a period of several years, the human child is totally dependent on some form of 'mothering' if it is to survive. This unique situation of instinct proverty means that the human organism develops a realm of experience and a mode of object reactivity that is premised on the contingent *symbols* (including gestures) accompanying parental socialization. The requisite element of self-esteem is thus not determined solely by the organism but rather by a type of bargaining process between organism and mothering object, in which the organism gradually *learns* what reaction is necessary to maintain a warm feeling of development. It is the unique combination of objects-as-action-possibilities, symbols, and shades of anxiety vs. self-esteem which constitutes the *meaning* of the human organism's realm of experience.

Meaning is thus seen as an overarching category which describes the integration between object, symbol, action-potential, and emotion. An object has meaning for an individual when a behavioral response can be called forth which facilitates action in relation to the object. Without this behavioral response and its accompanying symbol, the organism will tend not 'to see' the object in its perceptual field, i.e., it will be a 'meaningless' object for which the organism has neither action-potential nor emotion. Symbols thus serve to differentiate the environment for the actor, calling forth some objects for attention, action, and emotion, and relegating other objects to an epistemologically neutral background.

A further function of symbols is to enable the individual to generalize single-object responses to a wider range of phenomena so that the organism can continue to move forward through the environment with a maximum amount of safety, prediction, and self-esteem. Since initial or single-object responses are always learned in a unique setting composed of object-quality, specific symbol, and emotional set (anxiety/self-esteem), each individual's world of meaning is peculiarly unique and, as we shall see, peculiarly binding. (This does not mean, of course, that classes of individuals cannot share broadly similar meaning characteristics.) The learning of meaning can be either constricting or liberating, depending on how object-responses and symbols are acquired by the organism and depending on how they are linked together in increasingly more complex structures of consciousness.

Organismic Funding

It is in relation to the quality of meaning acquisition that Becker's normative position receives its most specific formulation. As the organism encounters objects, attains symbols, and registers responses and feelings, it gradually becomes a 'funded reservoir of meanings'. The world is gradually built into the organism so that at any given time there is a fund of symbol-action-feeling potential which describes the organism's state of tension and readiness to move forward. This readiness varies from individual to individual, depending mainly on the developmental balance between two broad types of experience: 'doing' and 'undergoing'. These phases describe respectively the active-testing and passive-integrating aspects of organism-object interaction. In the doing phase, the organism stretches itself out toward the object, probing, penetrating, exercising its powers in an attempt to clarify the difference between 'me' and 'it'. In the undergoing phase, the organism reverts back upon itself, assessing the effect of the world on its own characteristics and consolidating experience into new structures for future action.

The normative basis for human action can thus be related to a 'better' or 'poorer' developmental process of organismic funding. The positive side of the evaluative continuum goes in the direction of a proper, ongoing balance between doing and undergoing, while the negative side develops in relation to an over-emphasis *in the one or the other* mode of experience. A 'richly funded' organism is one which has grown through a balanced process of outgoing, experimental action and incoming, integrating reflection. The testing out of self-powers on objects renders a deep sense of organismic competence at the same time that the periods of passive integration allow for the consolidation of a complex structure of stored, functional symbols. The organism moves forward with a growing repertoire of action-symbol possibilities and an increasingly complex understanding of the totalistic setting of its personal well-being. A strong sense of identity and a warm feeling of self-regard become the individual's most vital resources in a world for which he is otherwise instinctively barren.

On the negative side of development, we find excesses in either doing or undergoing. If the organism acts too easily in relation to its environment, if it doesn't get the chance to test out its powers in difficult but surmountable confrontations, there will then arise a situation where action possibilities are numerous and widespread in relation to a large number of objects, but where the symbol repertoire is extremely narrow and invested with a poverty of feeling. Unless organismic action is periodically confronted by the limits of self-powers, there will be no need to 'fall back and regroup', no phases of undergoing, and no variation in the symbol-action structure. All actions will be imbued with the constricting symbolical-emotional content which happens to accompany the peculiar ends of the **primary socializing agent**. Becker associates this particular form of deficient funding with such mental problems as psychosis and depression.

The other negative extreme in organismic development is the situation where the organism is systematically hindered in action; where the exercise of self-

powers is either constantly frustrated or not allowed at all; and where the self is forced to withdraw more and more into a saving world of internal symbols. Instead of getting overly easy action with poor feed-back for funding, the organism which undergoes too much gets practically *no* self-initiated-and-carried-out action and does not, therefore, build up a differentiated sense of organismic powers. At the worst extreme, this can lead to a total severance of the symbolic from the organismic (as in infant autism), but at best it implies a mode of passive resignation and powerlessness; a retreat to the internal world of fantasy and symbolic 'action'. In general, Becker associates this type of excessive undergoing with the difficult and controversial syndrome of schizophrenia.

In sum, an excess of doing tends to empty experience of its content while an excess of undergoing tends to undermine power. The desirable is a balance between the two whereby the organism achieves 'both a richness of experience and a flexibility in action'.¹¹

Abstraction and Intervention

The idea of organismic funding also presents interesting and relevant perspectives on the individual's ability to abstract from, and intervene in, social processes. 'To abstract', for Becker, is 'to refer an object to one's own intended use'. Such intentions always arise from, and are connected back to, initial object-organism interactions. We saw above that these interactions, or 'fundings', are always characterized by three elements: (1) the dyad of object qualities and organismic powers, i.e., the 'object-as-action possibility', (2) organismic feeling along the anxiety/self-esteem continuum, and (3) the symbol (or cognitive structure) by which the organism stores the above two aspects for future action. We saw further that all initial interactions are unique in regard to the countless combinations of characteristics which can emerge from the contingent fusion of these three elements. This means that when the organism begins to group initial interactions in broader classes for the facilitation of action, these broader classes will be affected by the quality of the initial funding. In other words, *distortions in the balance of organismic funding become permeated by class-specific peculiarities in the mode of object response*. The ability to abstract and theorize are thus *in general* either constricted or enhanced in line with the quality and balance of organismic funding.

It is from this perspective that Becker speaks of 'behavioral stupidity' and relates the problems of neurosis and alienation to deficiencies in *cognition*. If my ability to abstract is hampered as a result of constrictions in organismic funding, it is clear that the entire world of objects falls under the peculiar rules of my own self-esteem maintenance. This means, in turn, that my ability *to intervene* in the world for my own well-being is systematically distorted so as to work back *against* me, instead of *for* me. The individual that is poorly funded lacks the ability to act boldly and integrate broadly within an ever-increasing scope of meaning. An excess of doing results in a shallow and poorly integrated symbolic structure, such that abstractions do not render an adequate sense of extended

causality. The 'overdoer' is blindly unaware of the ramifications of his actions, both for his own basic well-being, as well as for that of others. An excess of undergoing, on the other hand, produces abstractions that are not solidly based in reaction potential, such that the notion of causality is at best diffuse and at worst totally misconceived. Intervention for the undergoer is usually such a frightening and unsuccessful experience that the regress to symbolic 'action' becomes the major mode of self-esteem maintenance.

Individual and Community

A final relevant perspective from Becker's work is that on the relationship between the individual and the community. The key to understanding this relationship is the vital principle of *symbolic self-esteem maintenance*. Man needs a mothering-one as both a primary object for self definition and as an intermediary between other objects and self. Full humanization takes place only when the infant has replaced physical interaction with the mothering-one with symbolic interaction. The organism is propelled forward by the need to avoid anxiety and attain a positive feeling of self-regard, and its object world becomes infused with the symbol-feeling tonus necessary to this end. The mothering-one uses biological dependence to gradually entice the organism into a mode of behavior which is in line with the mothering-one's own needs and desires, and which can be manipulated at a distance through symbols. In the first instance, therefore, the individual's relation to the community is established as a set of parental rules for the attainment of self-esteem through organismic action.

It is not long, however, before the organism is forced to perform and bargain in a wider context of symbolic demands. The various agencies of secondary socialization take over as the child is gradually brought into contact with an increasingly complex set of rules for self-esteem maintenance. Already at this stage it is possible to judge the quality of primary funding in relation to secondary demands, but the process remains an ongoing and emergent one with the potential for countless combinations of either change or reinforcement. This process of secondary socialization continues until death, at which point the final act itself is incorporated in a set of rules which may or may not aid the bereaved in their own continuing self-esteem projects. The death of a hero in charging an enemy 'pillbox' is, after all, received in a manner considerably different from a self-incurred death from a box of pills.

The example is fitting for the whole problem since, as Becker points out in a brilliant analogy, it is the business of being a 'hero' which seems to be at the very core of human motivation. Whether as seen from the perspective of the infant doing its utmost to please mom and dad, or from the perspective of the child trying to succeed in school, or of the worker struggling to advance on the job: all are *at least* characterized by one and the same motive, i.e., *the need to be an object of primary value in a world of meaningful action*. The languages of primary and secondary socialization are thus nothing more – nor *less* – than the equipment and ground rules for the game of heroism.

The analogy between human striving and heroism is extremely important because it directs attention to the fact that man's highest aspirations and lowliest defeats are all part of a fictive cultural plot. Culture-systems are hero-systems which provide the symbolic roles and statuses necessary for the transcendence of human instinctual deficiencies. The culture-system thus corresponds on the societal level to the linguistic self-system on the individual level. Both are integrated sets of meaning which provide the action-symbol-feeling combinations necessary to keep both biography and history moving forward. Both call out for attention and action specific objects which become invested with specific symbol-feeling characteristics in the pursuit of specific forms of heroism. Not only are they similar systems, however, but, more importantly, they are *integrated* systems. Personal languages of self-esteem maintenance are a reflection of parental self-esteem needs, which in turn are a reflection of societal self-esteem demands. Individual plots for heroism invariably become channelled into distinct structure-role patterns, which in general take on the character of rigid typecasting.

It is the rigidity of hero-systems and the extremely poor distribution of true heroic roles that calls for a clear understanding of the relationship between individual and community. In the first place, the cultural plot will lack *conviction* if each player does not do his best to sustain the fiction. Without conviction, the symbolic animal has no true basis for action, no touchstone of 'reality', and no *reason* to keep moving forward. Whether they are conscious of it or not, therefore, all individuals 'participate' in maintaining *some* form of hero-system.

Secondly, the rigidities of specific modes of organismic funding can be loosened up only through new and different funding experiences. The quasi automatic determinism which we associate with the idea of 'the unconscious' is in reality the constricting set of rules for interaction with objects which was laid down in the interests of both organismic and parental self-esteem. The rules, and their object-action-emotion referents, are 'unconscious' because the organism had no real say-so in the humanization contract. Due to the functional integration of society (in the service of specific self-esteem interests), these unconscious rules are usually reinforced in the course of organismic development such that personality and culture dovetail in the service of common themes. *The only way to unravel rules from objects, therefore, is to press for a reactivization of the funding process through current action in contemporary settings.* Man must either act as an adult on the objects and rules that determine him; or die as a child. To turn one's efforts toward the community meaning system and its rules of maintenance is thus to confront both the limits and potentiality of personal identity. To highlight the nature of this confrontation, Becker offers a provocative formula for testing out the funding characteristics of any given situation. He suggests two simple but penetrating questions: (1) Why do I not feel that I have the *right* to my own meanings? and (2) Why do I not have the *strength* to sustain that right?¹²

Finally, a third aspect of the individual-community relationship is the problem of ultimate meaning and ultimate transcendence. If all hero-systems are characterized by relativity and an unequal role allocation, the vital question arises as to whether or not a hero-system can be devised which offers *both* conviction and

equal opportunities for heroism. Becker's answer is that, if such a system is to be attained, it will have to be characterized by a *maximization of individuality within a maximization of community*. This implies that a maximization of organismic growth requires a maximization of action possibilities within a rich and diversified cultural scheme.

Such a possibility is, as Becker points out, actually a paradox, since individual freedom cannot be expanded without, initially at least, threatening community solidarity. This is not seen as a problem, however, since an ideal *should* be paradoxical if it is to stimulate the imagination in a critical direction and serve as a yardstick on progress. The core idea of Becker's principle here is that the individual requires a rich meaning system to grow and that the attainment of this system is a community project. When carried to its logical limit within Becker's framework, it can be seen that this project is ultimately one of total cooperation within a nonmanipulative communication system, since anything less implies that some individuals are stunting the growth of others, *as well as their own growth*, by hindering a maximum of action-object-symbol development. It is necessary to stress the fact that the individual's basic well-being is dependent on the role *others* play in the joint heroic epic, not only because of the need for conviction mentioned above, but more importantly because it is only through a total knowledge of 'the other' that the individual can know the depths and limits of his own action-symbol possibilities.

Such knowledge is necessary, since to be properly funded from a transcendental perspective is to possess a symbol system which incorporates *all* objects in a framework of self-enhancing action readiness. Given the fact that the most unpredictable of these objects is man himself, the individual's funding in this regard can never be complete, due to the realization that man is, as Sartre puts it, the creature who in essence can always say 'no'. 'No', that is, to being defined as an object in another's self-esteem project. Once the core of freedom is established as the right to a self-defined identity, the ethical basis will be laid for nonsadistic communication within a common emancipatory project. The good society from Becker's point of view is thus a society characterized by a democratization of man's *only* essential need: the need to name and claim the material world as a stage for heroic transcendence. The categorical imperative for such a society is not only 'do unto others as you would have others do unto you,' but also 'fund others as you yourself *must* be funded to attain full humanity'.

4. Action and Participation

It now remains to spell out some of the implications of Becker's ideas for the problem of participation and democracy.

Each individual life project can be seen as being carried out within a variety of action settings. These settings vary widely in their degrees of institutionalization, i.e., in the degree to which action is structured in terms of articulated, sanctioned, and shared role specifications. From the point of view of organismic funding,

these role specifications provide the individual with: (a) a set of *symbols* (rights, duties, rules) in relation to (b) a set of *objects* (things, people, tasks) which, when taken in combination, provide (c) a certain *status* (prestige, self-esteem). Each action setting is thus a re-enactment of the basic funding process whereby the individual strives to maintain and enhance self-esteem by taking symbolic cues from his environment for the facilitation of forward-moving action. If we follow the emphasis of Pateman, Bachrach, and others on *decision making* as the focal point of participation, we can then say that we are interested here in decisions relevant to the above three role elements. Who decides which symbols will characterize the action-object-status characteristics of a given action setting?

A major advantage of Becker's approach is that it enables us to discuss the general characteristics of an action setting in relation to funding characteristics, at the same time that the 'demands' of these characteristics direct attention to the most essential decision-making areas. It is also possible to talk about different *types* of decision making, since it is now clear that action settings are composed of several interrelated elements, *any one of which* is open to manipulation and change. Management can, for example, restructure a job setting by altering spheres of duty, by taking away or supplementing objects, by changing status hierarchies, or by denying access to the action setting altogether. By focusing attention on these possibilities through the model of organismic growth, it should be possible to sensitize actors to their overall self-esteem needs and to guide their participatory efforts toward those decisions which have the most direct funding consequences. *The model of participation in funding settings is thus both an explanatory tool and an exhortation to critical consciousness.* As such, it provides at least one set of answers to the questions raised above in relation to Pateman's approach.

(1) *Why are people happy when they participate?*

Pateman cites a large number of studies showing that in nearly every instance where participation is increased there is a rise in feelings of self-esteem and well-being. Quoting from Blumberg's comprehensive survey of experiments in industrial democracy, she says that 'there is hardly a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced or that other generally acknowledged beneficial consequences accrue from a genuine increase in workers' decision-making power'.¹³ These results are, of course, one of the major supports for her argument, but she is nonetheless somewhat surprised since, as she points out, most of the participatory schemes thus far employed are actually cases of pseudo or, at best, partial participation.¹⁴ She concludes that even the semblance of participation seems to have positive psychological effects, but she does so rather nervously, since she seems to realize that this might be interpreted as proof for the argument that token democracy is actually sufficient.

The model of organismic funding here provides a clearer perspective on the matter, especially since Pateman never really spells out exactly what the 'psychological effect' of greater participation consists of. From what was presented

above, it is possible to view each action setting as providing opportunities for either balanced or imbalanced organismic growth. By definition, an individual will be most happy in a balanced setting which allows for the development of self-powers freely in relation to a wide and varying scope of objects. The cognitive-symbolic structure developed in this type of setting should be of such an expansive nature as to constantly bring the individual into direct contact with whatever it is that seems, at a given moment, to be hindering further action integrations. It is at these points of decision making that, theoretically, the demand for participation both should and will arise spontaneously. Well-being in general derives from the feeling that the individual is himself creating a meaningful existence by associating new symbols and emotions with the exercise of self-powers in difficult but challenging situations, and that the feeling of mastery is growing in both space and time.

The opportunity for such balanced organismic funding is, at present, mainly an idealistic goal rather than a common event. Most action settings are characterized by one or the other form of imbalance, and the problem for participation is to correct the balance in the direction of better funding opportunities. Still, the ideal type provides an understanding for why, *under certain conditions*, only token participation can result in greater personal satisfaction. Since most action settings are extremely out of balance – marriage and wage labor, for example – the slightest change can have enormous significance in allowing the individual to alter either actions or symbols in a more self-fulfilling direction. Providing it is not too late, that is; providing, in other words, that the individual has not already cut off his sense of action or sense of meaning in the face of overwhelming self-esteem demands. In such cases, token participation along *any* dimension will in all probability be neither registered nor exploited.

(2) *What happens when people do not participate?*

The inability of people to take advantage of preferred participation possibilities is one of the clearest results of a lack of *true* participation. For the vast majority of citizens in industrialized, democratic polities, political participation has long since taken on the function of ritualized mass ‘undergoing’. Sporadic electoral participation in the political system and nonparticipation and manipulation in the industrial system have left the average citizen basically unfunded in relation to both the means of power and the means of production. Politics has become, in Murray Edelman’s term, ‘symbolic action’, with the average citizen discussing more and more and doing less and less. Political apathy is not, therefore, part of an understandably weak human nature in the age of affluence, but rather part of a weak history of organismic development in the age of passivization. In pursuing the rewards of materialist, alienated hero-systems, modern political man has sold his birthright to his own self-determined identity and retreated to the world of periodic political circuses. Instead of confronting his object world in his own name – and *naming process* – he has accepted the mediating definitions of ‘representatives’ and entrusted his ‘interests’ to corporate political poker.

In short, people who do not participate in the action settings which determine their identities and self-esteem are bound to become alienated from both their societies and themselves. In general, the major problem at present seems to be in the direction of excessive undergoing, where the individual is strongly limited in objects-as-action-possibilities. How meaningful can a world really be, in terms of a wide range of potential actions and symbols, when the major part of one's daily action is devoted to monotonous interaction with a single mechanical object? The beauty of Becker's scheme, however, is that it is not limited to the classical case of industrial alienation, but applies to any action setting where one or the other element of the funding process is deficient. We might be led to believe, for example – as both Pateman and Bachrach apparently do – that the powerful in society are *really* the 'participators' who, because of their control over their own life situations, are in positions with maximum self-esteem potential.

Becker's demand for organismic balance warns against such a mistake. Power and the freedom of action over outcome may give the impression of well-being which we associate with decision-making in *The Achieving Society*, but if the underlying mode of funding is a result of excessive doing, there is little cause to envy the narrow and fragile meaning base upon which the psychological structure rests. The loss of only *half* a fortune has frequently been enough to send the over-achieving hero plummeting from a tenth-story window to the utter bafflement of the 'man in the street'. It is extremely important, therefore, to be clear over the 'how' of participation, as well as the 'where' and 'what', so as to avoid the rather common dialectic of moving from one mode of funding imbalance to another.

(3) *What actually is the educative effect?*

A more specific answer is required for this question, since Pateman's educative effect is apparently derived from a rather simplistic learning theory, which implies that participation *per se* leads to greater participation and a better political awareness, much in the same way as the learning of physics makes better handy-men of us all. Well maybe it does and maybe it doesn't, *depending on the qualitative nature of the participatory learning going on*. Increases in participation can be structured as increases in doing, increases in undergoing, or increases in balanced organismic development. Action settings can be structured so that actors: (a) do more within the same narrow symbol-feeling framework, (b) do the same or less within an artificially expanded symbol-feeling framework, or (c) increase coincidentally *both* action-object possibilities and the richness and scope of symbol-feeling structures. Only the latter qualifies as true participation from the perspective of organismic growth, and only the latter will have the ultimate positive effects on the community as a whole.

If the educative effect is to have any substance at all, it must be an effect which changes the individual in the direction of a deeper understanding of the forces determining his personal well-being and life chances. If action settings, such as

the workplace, bias funding in one or the other directions of imbalance, the individual will lack qualities of both initiative and abstraction so that it is virtually impossible for him to know where he should intervene in the system of causality which surrounds and oppresses him. He is 'behaviorally stupid', in that he lacks the symbols and actions necessary for self-enhancing change. Political consciousness can only be developed through an awareness of funding limitations and funding needs as these are tested out, threatened, and enhanced in concrete action settings.

The core of the educative effect is, therefore, not that participation in one setting leads to participation in another setting, but rather that *true* participation in one setting is the catalyst for understanding the relationship *between* settings. By insisting on an expanding scope of meaning (object-action-symbol-feeling possibilities) to micro levels, the individual gradually extends his range of understanding to include those macro processes which form the context of his various institutionalized projects. This enables him to comprehend 'distant' political decisions in terms of his own growth needs, at the same time that he is able to initiate actions in the direction of self-enhancing structural change. Participation in terms of balanced organismic funding thus becomes a program for uniting theory and praxis in the service of a transcendental life project.

5. The Languages of Action

Summing up, it is possible to demonstrate the relevance of Becker's ideas for a social-psychology of participation in terms of four 'languages' of action. Each language refers to the set of symbols, rules, or gestures which guide individual action by means of anxiety/self-esteem overtones through the object worlds of various behaviour settings.

(1) *The language of primary socialization*, by which the organism receives its original funding and develops a basic personality mode in the course of being humanized. The relationship between rules, objects, and emotions acquired here serves as a fundamental perceptual and behavioral structure through which subsequent funding experiences must be filtered for testing, reinforcement, and change.

(2) *The language of secondary socialization*, by which the individual gradually, but with increasing intensity, enters into the arena of the cultural hero-system. The self-esteem demands of institutional roles take over the guiding function of the facilitation of action and make their own, more general, contribution to the developing fund of meaning.

(3) *The language of situational motivation*, which in any contemporary action setting provides demands on the languages of primary and secondary socialization at the same time that it offers the potential of new funding experiences. The motivation of current action settings is always one of tension between 'unconscious' rule-following in the service of previous self-esteem demands and the primary need of transcendent organismic growth.

(4) *The language of transcendent growth*, which is the language of Becker's

ethical position interwoven with his empirically based synthetic model. It is a language constructed from the idea of what it is to be human for the sake of measuring deviations from *man's* potential. It is both a guideline for comparing existing hero-systems and a program for ultimate heroism. Its key premise is the existence of only a single basic human need: the need to integrate space and time in ever-widening cognitive structures for the facilitation of emancipatory action.

These four languages are not separate phenomena, but integrated aspects of human development in specific historical and socio-economic settings. Every individual life cycle begins in relation to mothering-ones who have themselves been affected by the dynamics of the other four languages. Ultimately, therefore, the individual's desire and capacity for participation in society are dependent upon extremely complex patterns of motivational themes in relation to social objects and groups. Each individual will judge his participation chances and needs in terms of a personal knowledge of 'social reality', which is a result of both a structural position (i.e., a conglomerate of interlocking institutional roles) and a personal biography. Such a situation demands a theory of participation which views isolated personal preferences skeptically; structural consistencies critically; and human striving ethically. Becker's perspective forces us to acknowledge that the relationship between participation and democracy is not one which can be established by fiat from classical theorists nor built up empirically from 'present reality'. It is a relationship which must be constantly redefined in terms of emerging social reality and rewon in the face of recurrent social reification.

NOTES

1. Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970). For a useful short summary of the debate with a good bibliography see Herbert McClosky, 'Political Participation', in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Macmillan Co. and Free Press, 1968), Vol. 12, pp. 252-265.
2. Numerous contributions have already been made to both sides of the issue since the appearance of Pateman's book. Among the most relevant for the present discussion are Robert Dahl, *After the Revolution? Authority in a Good Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970); Daniel C. Kramer, *Participatory Democracy: Developing Ideals of the Political Left* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Co., 1972); Campbell Balfour, *Participation in Industry* (London: The Free Press, revised edition, 1971); and John Plamenatz, *Democracy and Illusion: An Examination of Certain Aspects of Modern Democratic Theory* (London: Longmans, 1973).
3. Cf., J. A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943).
4. Pateman, p. 27.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
8. P. Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967).
9. Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (New York: The Free Press, Revised edition, 1971); *The Revolution in Psychiatry: The New Understanding of Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1964); and *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man* (New York: George Braziller, 1968).
10. A short summary of many of Becker's major ideas is to be found in his article 'Mills'

Social Psychology and the Great Historical Convergence on the Problem of Alienation,' in Irving Louis Horowitz (ed.), *The New Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 108–133.

11. Becker, *The Revolution in Psychiatry*, p. 42.
12. Becker, *The Structure of Evil*, p. 258.
13. Pateman, p. 66.
14. Pateman's differentiation between 'pseudo', 'partial', and 'full' participation is a vital one, and one that is often overlooked in the participation debate. Here too, however, the lack of a more specific social-psychology leaves a number of questions unresolved. See Pateman, pp. 67–72.