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van Dokkum, A.

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CHAPTER 4 – “DEMOCRACY”, VOTING, OPPOSITION AND CONSENSUS; SOME HISTORICAL COMMENTS

Graeber (2004: 96-97) makes the case for a more inclusive anthropology, relevant for our cross-cultural investigations about “democratic” politics:

[A]nthropologists are, effectively, sitting on a vast archive of human experience. [...] [But] anthropology seems a discipline terrified of its own potential. [...] Partly it’s just the vastness of the subject matter. Who really has the means, in discussing [e.g.] sovereignty, to consider everything Chinese or Indian or Islamic thinkers have had to say on the matter [...]? It’s just too daunting. As a result, anthropologists [are] turning over the work to European philosophers [concerning e.g.] sovereignty, as if [this] had [...] never [been] meaningfully discussed by anyone outside [...] Western Europe or North America.

Hence I shall include ideas from ancient India, ancient China, the earlier Muslim world and some other areas in theoretical reflections of political theory, in an attempt not to be daunted by the vastness of the subject matter, or, to use Santos’s (1998: 103) apt terminology, not to commit *epistemicide*, the world-historically selective “murder of knowledge”.

This chapter has four tasks. First, to show that certain ideas that may be associated with “democracy” are not specifically European. Second, to investigate the possibility that Euro-Americans may have been influenced by others concerning “democracy”. Third, most importantly, this chapter will argue that the related interpretations of “democracy” as given by Rousseau and Arrow are indeed not historically widely shared across different cultures of the world, in contrast with certain other ideas. To substantiate the claims I shall make use of information from selected examples of political thinking in ancient India, ancient China, the Muslim world, the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) confederacy in North America in the 18th century, and the Somali of the 1950s. As I have already indicated above, this is also meant as a practical means to avoid a too heavy Euro-American bias in my analyses. Fourth, I investigate possible interpretations of “consensus”.

“State-of-nature” arguments

I begin with one specific idea that is so widespread cross-culturally that it is inconvenient to mention under geographic captions: the so-called “state-of-nature” idea. Tooker (1990: 296n6) maintains that “[i]deas such as ‘the state of nature,’ [...] are, like so many other ideas we hold, Western philosophical notions”. We may agree that the idea usually attributed to Hobbes

(1995: 134-138 [ch. 13]) occurs in the Western world, but what Tooker seems to mean is that it is only and specifically Western. If this is what is meant then it is not possible to agree because there have existed at least five predecessors of Hobbes's argument which, although not exactly similar, are much like it: *Mozi*¹¹ (± 4th century BC); *Guanzi*¹² (± 250 BC); Kautilya¹³ (± 300 BC); Ibn Taymiyyah¹⁴ (1263-1328); and Ibn Khaldūn¹⁵ (1332-1406). Either all these variants had a common origin long before Hobbes, or at least some of them were brought forward independently. In either case, the idea cannot be considered specifically Western as Tooker seems to suggest.

Some ancient political theory and practice

The north of the Indian subcontinent has known the occurrence of republican rule “from the earliest times to the 6th century AD” according to Misra (1976: xiii), and Sharma (1968: 11) calls it “an almost perfect form of democracy”. The existence of the following items seems to be undisputed: councils and assemblies in non-monarchical republics; the choice of a king subject to approval by a multitude in monarchies; and debating halls. Government in the ancient Indian republics was mostly confined to the Kshatriya caste. Misra (1976: 245) therefore speaks of “caste aristocracy” in comparison with the “class aristocracy” of the ancient Greek republics.¹⁶

Ancient Athenian “democracy” comprised ideas of *liberty* and *equality* and procedural aspects such as *rotation*, *lot*, and *elections* to select people for office, and reaching *consensus* or applying (majority) *voting* to make collective decisions with individuals' direct participation in a citizens' assembly (Held 1987: 16-22). I revisit majority voting below.

As for China, we may refer to Mencius (~ Mengzi, 4th-3^d century BC). He was against

¹¹ *Mozi* (2010: 119; § 13.2-3); Johnston in *Mozi* (2010: xli); Van Norden (2011: 58); Watson ([ed.] 1967: 34-35).

¹² *Guanzi* (XI, 1a7-1b in Rickett 1985: 412-413; cf. pp. 3, 14-15, 37).

¹³ Kautilya (1915: 31; bk. 1, ch. 13). I apologize for not being able to write dots under romanizations of Sanskrit and Arabic writing.

¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah (1982: 20). Ayoob (2006: 4) states Hobbes “must have read” Ibn Taymiyyah, but gives no proof.

¹⁵ Ibn Khaldūn (1950: 100-101, 103). Ibn Khaldūn's being a source of Hobbes is, as with Ibn Taymiyyah, difficult to prove or disprove without specifically targeted research (cf. Juynboll 1931: 144, 166). On the other hand one might hypothesize that Muslim scholars got the “state-of-nature” idea from the Chinese, which is not *a priori* impossible for the 13th century AD (Morewedge 2009: 435).

¹⁶ This paragraph, where not indicated: Sharma (1968: 27, 32, 34, 42, 47); Misra (1976: 152; 176, 192, 244, 250, 252, 261).

unconditional obedience to any ruler and thought it possible for subordinates to depose their leaders (*Mengzi* 1970: 66-68; 188-189; 1B8, 7A31). He had an idea of a collective desire of “the people” as basis for decision making and the choice of a paramount leader (1970: 69, 196; 1B10, 7B14); these ideas of Mengzi square well with definitions (12) and (13) above concerning consent. The *Guanzi*, already mentioned, states about the prince that he is not to be an arbitrary ruler who can set aside the law for self-interest or favouritism (*Guanzi* XI, 2b in Rickett 1985: 414). The idea of “rule of law” is thus established in the book.

Much of Islamic political theory applies to the community of the believers, or *umma* (Abbink pers. comm.). There are interesting procedural aspects, though. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013 AD) maintained that election rather than designation was the appropriate way of installing an imam (leader of the Muslims), basing the validity of consensus on the tradition that the *umma* “will never agree on an error” (Ibish 1966: 86-91, 138). Apparently Al-Bāqillānī maintained that there could be only one imam, which would in practice limit participation of people in order to elect a new one in an actual meeting (Ibish 1966: 91-92, 95; Crone 2005b: VII-38). Al-Asamm (d. c. 816 AD) on the other hand promoted the idea that elections should be open to all of the community and that exactly because the community was too large to come together, there might be several imams, or just local governments. Deposition of an “erring imam” was deemed possible by several Mu‘tazilites and the Khārijites (Crone 2005a: IX-63).

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) in North America are of interest because they represent a rare occasion where the influence of a society outside Europe on a Euro-American society has been recognized, namely concerning the US American Constitution (Feathers and Feathers 2006). There is some evidence that at least Benjamin Franklin saw the viability of the principle of unity in diversity in the political constitution of the Haudenosaunee League of Six Nations for application to the different North American colonies (later states). The Haudenosaunee have been heralded as bearers of peace and freedom (Mann 2006: ch. 11) and inclusive decision-making (Morgan 1962: 77, 138, 105-106; Mann 2006-2005: 439-440; Tooker 1988: 312). Johansen (1990: 283, based on O’Callaghan) explains the relationship between the confederal character of the League and Franklin’s Albany Plan:

The individual colonies were to be allowed to retain their own constitutions, except as the [Albany] plan circumscribed them. The retention of internal sovereignty within the individual colonies closely resembled the Iroquoian system and had no precedent in England.

The nomadic Somali of the Horn of Africa of the 1950s as described by Lewis (1999) provide examples of assembly decision making and the idea of representation. They were a

people with decentralized (“acephalous”) politics within a social set-up known as “segmentary”. Lineages, or alliances of lineages up to the level of clan, were operating as political units. Since there existed no Weberian “monopoly of legitimate physical coercion” (Weber 1956: 29, § 17), political power was a function of a lineage’s (male) strength in numbers and consequently fighting strength (Lewis 1999: 1-7, 149-151, 162-172). Groups established contracts between them, approved by family heads in councils where all adult males had a right to speak. At councils agreements

are reached by majority decisions following the direction taken by the consensus of feeling at a meeting. [...] Where a large lineage [...] is concerned, delegates may be chosen to represent each of the component lineages and sent to a central meeting-place (ibid.: 198).

Some historical notes on voting and majority rule

I have mentioned already that people in ancient Athens at times applied voting with majority rule. It is known that as a procedure majority voting is not specifically European. Kautilya, whom we met above, writes about suggestions of the “majority” of a king’s ministers (1915: 39-40; bk. 1 ch. 15 – cf. 253; bk. 3 ch. 11). A strict procedure does not become clear from the text. The early Buddhist *Kullavagga* (1900: 24-65; 4.9-14; 1st century BC; cf. Muhlberger and Paine 1993: 37) on the other hand, provides procedures for majority voting (apparently binary – two options to choose from) within the community of monks. The vote teller could veto the result (1900: 56-57; 4.14). The motivation for majority voting seems to have been the possibility to avoid disputes amongst the monks themselves to be interminable. Perhaps for this reason also, voting was *forbidden* when it could be expected that it could lead to a schism (*Kullavagga* 1900: 27; 4.10). The *Guanzi* does not treat voting but is against factional partisanship altogether, not only because it might produce rebellion (XI, 8a in Rickett 1985: 423) but also because it might create turmoil in which “large factions will come to the fore while smaller ones are pushed back” (I, 65/2a10 in 1985: 111). On the other hand Rickett (1998: 189n11) provides the information that state officials made decisions “based on majority opinion” (Rickett gives no procedural information). Aristotle (1997: 90-91; bk. 3, ch. 8) makes the comment from a typological viewpoint that “democracy” (in contrast with “oligarchy”) has no intrinsic relationship with majority rule; if the well-off were in the majority and in control of power and the needy in the minority, one should not call that “democracy”. McLean and Urken (1995: 1-2) state that the ancient Greeks “normally took only binary votes” (yes or no to stated proposals). No *theory about* voting seems to have been

formulated. Pliny the Younger considered a concrete voting situation with three options (1995: 2, 15). The election of the third caliph (successor of Muhammad), ‘Uthmān, presupposes the idea of election with majority and minorities in a situation of at least five candidates, but this was not considered an ideal method (Crone 2005b: VII-1-7).

In more recent times, specific justifications for majority rule came to be put forward. Hobbes (1995: 167; ch. 16) motivates majority rule by reasoning that the number of the minority cancels out against an equal number within the majority, which leaves a number of people not contradicted. It seems he would consider a difference of one person enough to sanctify a decision. After a poll the opinion of the majority should *a posteriori* be taken as the voice of the whole of a group. Locke (1992: 164-166; § 95-99) did not reason from a cancellation principle but maintained that adherence to majority rule is necessary because the concerned community, to which any individual consented to be part of before any poll, needs to act as one body. Without binding majority rule the community would “immediately dissolve”. From § 99 it appears Locke means “majority” as including situations with one vote difference, with the possibility for people to agree (that would be before a poll) on greater majorities for taking decisions. Rousseau’s (1988: book IV, ch. 2) approach to voting is that voting is a way to discover an *a priori* existing “general will”; it includes situations with one vote difference. It is interesting to see that Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau have different motivations for majority rule, though all seem to reason from binary situations, with only two options to choose from in a poll. From a technical viewpoint on exact polls, where one vote can make a difference, the binary aspect makes the three authors’ treatments deficient, because many situations a community may have to deal with can concern more than two possibilities at once. The theories of Condorcet and Borda can be seen as attempts to grapple with the problem of how to define an “optimal” voting system. Arrow’s discovery that there exists no “optimal” voting system in this tradition is *within* that tradition of fundamental importance. Let us study these topics in more detail.

Rousseau, Condorcet, Borda, Arrow and arriving at collective decisions using voting

As said, in *The Social Contract* Rousseau (1712-1778) promoted voting as a means to *discover* the pre-existing “general will” of a people (1988: book IV, ch. 2), a motivation for voting that differs from Hobbes’s cancellation idea and Locke’s idea of establishing political stability. According to Rousseau voters are rather judges, and through counting votes a prevailing position would be determined that “correctly” identified the “general will”;

minorities would simply have voted mistakenly (*ibid.*). Because different voting procedures are conceivable, especially when there are more than two options to choose from, the problem at the time was how to find a voting system that properly identified the “general will”. Two methods stand out, that of the Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), and that of Jean-Charles de Borda (1733-1799) – see McLean and Hewitt ([eds.] 1994).

Condorcet’s theory of majority voting entails that all voters compare pairwise all alternatives, giving their preference to one or the other alternative within each pair. This is equivalent to voters submitting lists in which they arrange all available alternatives from most preferred to least preferred. Ideally (not necessarily) this results in a collective ordering which results from all pairwise comparisons across all voters. This contrasts with a “first-past-the-post” system, where only a voter’s first, most preferred, alternative would be considered and the alternative with the highest number of such votes would be adopted (in English also referred to as a “plurality vote” – 1994: 80). Condorcet’s system may lead to other alternatives being selected as the winner than in “first-past-the-post” plurality systems, as the following table with a total of 100 hypothetical voters and three hypothetical alternatives A, B, and C shows. The top row indicates numbers of voters, supporting the ordering of alternatives beneath each number with the alternative most preferred being highest in the column and the least preferred lowest.

	42	3	4	4	8	39
A	A	A	C	B	B	C
B	B	C	A	A	C	B
C	C	B	B	C	A	A

In this table, with 100 voters, A would win in a plurality system with 45 against B with 12 and C with 43. In a run-off election where the candidates with the two highest scores compete in a second round (such as often in presidential elections in France and possibly in Mozambique), B would be barred from competing and with all voters voting again C would win from A with 51 against 49 (from the columns with B highest, A gets four extra votes but C eight extra). However, B is the Condorcet winner, because in Condorcet’s system B wins from A with 51 against 49 and from C with 54 against 46. A peculiarity of Condorcet’s method is that in some cases this can lead to circular collective outcomes, e.g. A wins from B, B from C, and C from A (Weale 1992: 207; McLean and Hewitt 1994: 37-38, 41, 73).

Borda proposed a voting method that assigns numerical values to individual voters' orderings of alternatives, for example the last alternative (least preferred) zero points, the second-to-last one point, the third-to-last two points and so on. The alternative with the highest total number of points wins. Suppose three individuals P, Q and R have the following preference orderings for three alternatives A, B, and C (Mackie 2003: 147):

P	Q	R
A	C	C
B	A	A
C	B	B

In the table above, A and C have a tie with each four points in the Borda count, and B loses having one point. In the Condorcet rank ordering method, C is de Condorcet winner, and A wins from B. Now suppose Q swaps the ordering (of Q) between A and B. C then remains the Condorcet winner. In the Borda method, however, if Q swaps A and B, this affects C's social ranking relative to A, because instead of a tie between A and C, A now has only three points and C stands *above* A in the social preference ordering. Thus changing B's positioning only in Q's ordering relative to A affects C's social ordering. This effect of the relative social ordering of two alternatives being sensitive to the ranking of *another* alternative is known as a violation of the principle of the *independence of irrelevant alternatives*, which states that the social (collective) preference between two alternatives should not change when a third alternative gets ranked differently (relatively to other alternatives) by one or more individuals.

The methods of Condorcet and Borda were anticipated by Ramon Llull (c. 1232-1316) and Nicolaus von Kues (~ Cusanus; 1401-1464), almost certainly independent from Muslim influence. Later formulations of a similar nature were also within a Euro-American context (McLean and Urken 1995; McLean, Lorrey and Colomer 2008). The search for a theoretically substantiated "optimal" voting system can therefore legitimately be viewed, anthropologically speaking, as specifically Euro-American, in contrast with such ideas like the "state-of-nature" argument. However, before Arrow nobody knew whether it was possible to reconcile the "problems" encountered with the methods of Condorcet and Borda which were liable to the possibility of cycles and the violation of the principle of independence of irrelevant alternatives. Now Arrow (1963) tried to synthesize a method for finding a

collective preference ordering from individual preference orderings, and with this a social choice, which would be resistant against problems such as occurring in the methods of Condorcet and Borda. Such an attempt may be seen as a theoretical culmination of an intellectual trajectory concerning voting that started from Rousseau's formulation of the "general will" (McLean and Hewitt ([eds.] 1994: 37-38). However, the result of Arrow's research was that such an envisioned collective choice method is not possible in a mathematically consistent way for three or more alternatives when certain "conditions" are taken into account, such as the principle of independence of irrelevant alternatives. This result is usually known as Arrow's impossibility theorem, or Arrow's paradox.¹⁷

I will not go into the details of the contradiction, but rather discuss how Arrow's theory is related to Rousseau's "general will". Arrow's method is based on "social welfare functions" (SWFs). The basic idea of a social welfare function is that preference orderings of individuals concerning a set of eligible alternatives are aggregated into a collective (social) preference ordering (Arrow 1963: 22-23; Feldman and Serrano 2006: 276, 291-292). The top preference(s) in the collective preference ordering consist(s) of the alternative(s) that are not strictly preferred by any other alternative, and that are either strictly preferred over or considered equivalent to all other alternatives. Such alternative(s) form(s) the *choice set* (term used by e.g. Sen 1970: 10, but dependent on Arrow 1963: 15). Ideally the choice set consists of only one element. For strict preference orderings (where no two alternatives are equivalent in any ordering) I give the idea schematically in Figure 1 (where « $a > b$ » indicates "a is strictly preferred over [not considered equivalent to] b"):

¹⁷ The other conditions are that all combinations of individual transitive orderings are to be allowed for establishing some collective ordering, that when all individuals prefer some alternative over some other, the collective ordering should also prefer the first over the second, and that one single individual does not determine the collective ordering. Conditions' formulations may vary. See e.g. Weale (1992: 210). For proofs of the theorem see Feldman and Serrano (2006: 291-294); Sen (1970: 42-46); Weale (1992: 289-291). Arrow (1963: 25) calls the conditions "reasonable" and Suzumura states they are "necessary" for "democratic legitimacy" (2002: 11). For a critical discussion of the use of Arrow's theorem and its conditions concerning US American history, see Mackie (2003).

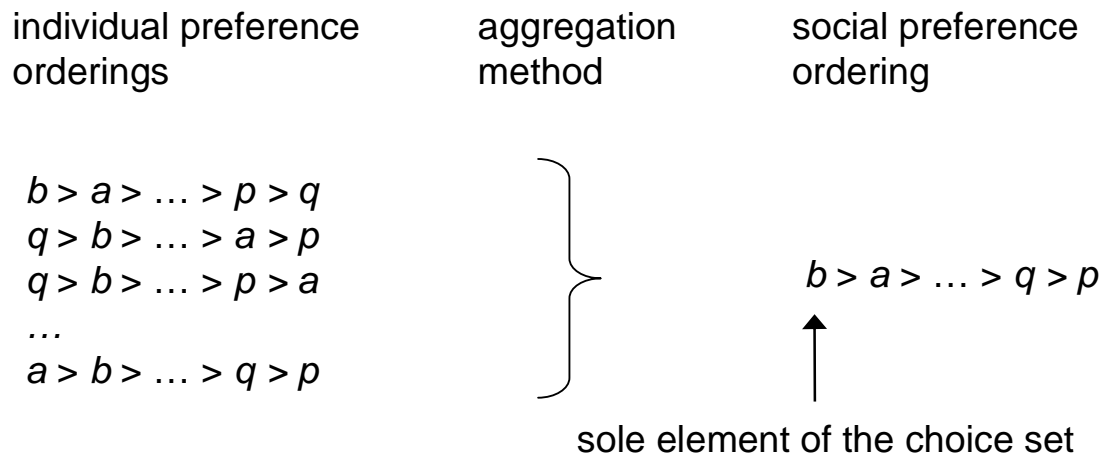


Figure 1: Arrow's theory of the aggregation of preferences; strict preference orderings

In Figure 1, the alternative b is the one that in the collective preference ordering, as produced by the aggregation method, dominates all other alternatives. The choice set may be considered “the choice which society would actually make if confronted with a [given] set of alternatives” (Arrow 1963: 26), achieving a “social maximum” (p. 18). Although Arrow’s approach does not explicitly invoke Rousseau’s “general will” in direct connection with the choice set idea (although, in fact, Arrow’s discussion of Rousseau on pp. 81, 82, 85 goes some way towards such a connection), it resembles Rousseau’s approach because (a) it trusts a *formal device*, in order to (b) *select specific* alternatives (ideally just one) for inclusion in a choice set *discarding* all the others, to reach a “choice” for “society”, itself conceived of in an undifferentiated manner. In this sense Arrow’s approach is a mathematical generalization of the idea of “majority versus minority” in Rousseau’s sense, coupled to the requirement to be able to deal (also) with situations with more than two alternatives to choose from. Arrow’s interpretation of “democracy” is hugely influential in today’s academic theorizing, but the approach is also relevant because of the wide acceptance in practice of the choice set idea.

Arrow simply postulates that the choice set is “the choice which society would actually make”; in this way the technical device is elevated to a sort of anthropological instrument that reveals information what the choice is, hidden in society. It is hidden because if we would already know what “society would actually choose” we would not need the device to find it. It nonetheless is supposed to exist in the theory because the task of the device is to find it. To be sure, such social choice is not fixed (Arrow 1963: 22). Still it is a hidden existing item, just one which can vary when the configuration of individual preferences varies. As said, Arrow showed that the requirements he defined for an acceptable aggregation method to find

the choice set are inconsistent. In a related discussion about Condorcet cycles McLean and Hewitt ([eds.] 1994: 41, cf. 73) comment:

Cycles are deeply disturbing for democratic theory. [...] The general will of this community [with Condorcet cycles] appears to be self-contradictory.

Where Arrow's theory can be seen as generalizing the majority/minority dichotomy, his contradiction generalizes the Condorcet cycle problem, "used to shock at a more advanced level" (Mackie 2003: 82). This thesis, however, does not see the *contradiction* as most problematic, but the idea that Arrow's requirements for an acceptable selection device of an alternative (aggregation method) *would correspond* to "the choice which society would actually make", for the latter expression assumed that we should accept the theory that "society" *implies* that it "would make" a certain choice, which an aggregation method could point out. But I have argued already in chapter 2 that we cannot treat social collectivities like "society" as anthropological objects which unequivocally imply things. Thus where McLean and Hewitt argue the possible non-existence of the "general will" from contradictions in Condorcet's voting theory, I find the "general will" problematic directly from considerations about social collectivities themselves. In discussing "democracy", we should assume that "society" is not just "confronted" with several options but develops these through historical chains of events. It is difficult to understand why "society" would choose only one option after first having brought forth several.

On a procedural note, it is characteristic of the choice set approach that exact counting is necessary in order to reach a result. Arrow's theory implies exactness, because the arguments of its social welfare functions (taken as voting mechanisms) are additive and the functions uniquely specify social orderings for each combination of individual orderings. The additivity follows from the fact that the social welfare functions cannot distinguish between similar preference orderings of different voting individuals (the "anonymity" aspect; see Sen 1970: 68, 72). Then the only way to deal with those similar orderings is to summate the occurrences of them. The exactness then follows from the need to re-examine the specification given by a function when even only one individual ordering is replaced by another.

I have argued that Arrow's approach is part of a rather culturally specific approach to "democracy" that was formulated in Euro-American history. Arrow himself confirms this on the very first pages of his book when he claims or implies – without any ethnographic substantiation – that "elsewhere in the world" people know either dictatorship or uniformity

in convention and have no divergent individual wills. I have tried to show that this biased attitude towards “elsewhere in the world” influences the treatment of “democracy” itself, for from blocking considerations from “elsewhere” it might appear that Arrow’s approach towards “democracy” is the obvious one to adopt. That this is not necessarily the case is shown by theorizing about “consensus”, to which I shall now turn.

Consensus

In contrast with voting theory and Arrow’s impossibility theorem, there is less theoretical literature on consensus. Publications like Feldman and Serrano (2006) and Suzumura (2002) do not elaborate on “consensus”. Weale (1992: 215) does mention it as an alternative to Arrow’s model of collective choice but without further conceptual elaborations. Lehrer and Wagner (1981) do provide theoretical elaboration. I shall start, however, with “consensus” as put in explicit opposition to “majority rule”; Rescher and Wiredu are authors with contrasting views in this respect. Though Rescher (1993) argues against consensus as being attainable or even desirable, his book is useful for fixing thoughts. It is a book-length study and represents a firm standpoint in favour of “adversarial” politics as against “consensus”, which promotes highlighting certain issues. Later it will be investigated what Wiredu and also Gyekye have to say about the topic, and a modest conceptual inquiry of my own will be presented on the basis thereof.

Rescher initially defines consensus as “uniformity of belief and evaluation” (1993: 1), but later relates it to “widespread and pervasive *agreement*” (p. 44; emphasis original). He maintains that consensus is related to “a pre-democratic *dirigisme* [...] that is unwilling to let people go their own way into a social diversification” (p. 3; emphasis original). He advocates Anglophone political systems which know winner-take-all adversarial electoral methods in which minorities accept in acquiescence things without agreeing with them, and where conflict is functional in reaching collective decisions (pp. 159-161, 166). This approach, however, shows at least three analytical problems that seem to undermine Rescher’s case against consensus. First, using Anglo-American political systems as a prototype for majority adversarial decision making is ethnographically (and by consequence, theoretically) problematic. Due to the set-up of electoral districts in the United States and the UK, popular *minorities* can be deciding in the collective outcome of election procedures, so Anglo-American ways of collective decision making do not necessarily provide a good

example for what Rescher wants to illustrate about majoritarian politics.¹⁸ Second, it is not certain that consensus *formation* would not know conflict or opposition. A third complication is that with majority rule the minority must undergo the majority's wishes. Rescher does not explain how this could not be seen as the imposition of *dirigisme*. The third point is connected to the problem of how to deal with opposition, as explained by Wiredu.

Wiredu observes that in Africa “the party system was not a feature of traditional politics” (2001a: 162). In “traditional” Africa, there existed opposition between politically motivated groups, but there was no such thing as “*the* opposition”. Elections resulting in obtaining power by a majority of votes are new to Africa, while an African chief “ruled, on pain of possible dethronement, in accordance with the decisions of his council [of lineage heads], which were taken by consensus” (2001a: 162-163; emphasis original). According to Wiredu this element of “consensus” allows for “traditional” politics to be called “democratic” (p. 165). “Democracy” (majoritarian or not) is defined by Wiredu as “government by consent” (2001b: 175), so “government by consensus is democracy *par excellence*” (2001a: 166). If some majority of 51% “stoutly insists on the implementation of [its] decisions all the time, who would fault the minority if they should develop a deep sense of frustration with the system?” For this, the remedy is “sit around and talk” until consensus in the form of agreement or compromise is reached, where compromise will be more common because initial positions are often not in agreement: “conflict is for resolving” (2001a: 169), while dialogue can make possible “agreed actions without necessarily agreed notions” (1996: ch. 14).¹⁹ Consensus fulfils Wiredu’s condition to have oneself represented in both a *formal* and a *substantive* sense. The first concerns “representation of a given constituency in council”; the second “representation of the will of a representative in the making of a given decision”.

Thus we see that in contrast with Rescher’s assertions, consensus politics does not mean that opposition cannot exist, or that everybody agrees with everything in a collective decision that is made. This problem of “opposition” has cropped up ethnographically. Emeka Anyaoku comments that “I do not know of any African language whose political lexicon includes the concept of a ‘leader of the loyal opposition.’ Instead there is a clear concept of a political enemy” (in Buijtenhuijs and Rijniere 1993: 7). However, as Gyekye comments:

¹⁸ Rescher (1993: 32) also dismisses Arrow’s impossibility result, as a theory about “consensus formation” (cf. Arrow himself in 1963: 1n1, 83-86). This ignores the fact that Arrow’s theory is directly relevant for majority voting systems. In this thesis Arrow’s (1963) theory is not taken as an example of consensus.

¹⁹ I propose that one may understand “agreement” positively as the realization of what opposed individuals or groups have in common, and “compromise” negatively as the partial sacrifice by opposed individuals or groups of what they do not have in common.

Consensus logically presupposes dissensus [...], the existence of opposing or different views; for it is the opposing views that are, or need to be, reconciled. If there were no opposition, it would be senseless to talk of reaching a consensus. [...] [I]n the traditional Akan political practice there is opposition without an organized political party in opposition (Gyekye 1997: 130).

After these debates, it is now possible to formulate some thoughts on consensus more pertinently. A fundamental difference between Rescher and Wiredu is the aspect of maximizing consent across a political community concerning decisions. Where Rescher would sacrifice a minority's wishes for common decisions, even if that minority would be numerically substantial, Wiredu advocates solutions "that are [...] not obnoxious to any" (1996: 183). Viewed in this way, Rescher's narrower definition of the word « consensus » can be put aside, since "uniformity in belief and evaluation" is not required for consensus. I then shall arbitrate a definition of « consensus » as follows:²⁰

« Consensus » refers to situations in which collective decision making is obtained through participatory coordination towards a solution of original differences such that this solution is not unacceptable for a maximized, or perhaps universalized, number of participants across the *demos* of a political community.

This definition is more in line with what has been called a "soft" perception of consensus in contrast with a "traditional" definition that stresses unanimity (Kacprzyk, Nurmi and Fedrizzi 1997). Consensus does not have to manifest itself in one unique form. I propose the following as instances of consensus between two political groups (without claims to be exhaustive):

- (a) Search for a common denominator or intersection of proposed alternatives. For instance, from two packages $\{p, q, r, s\}$ and $\{q, r, s, t\}$, adopt $\{q, r, s\}$.
- (b) Sacrifice one's first choice. For instance, instead of choosing either of the proposed alternatives p or q , adopt r , which may be a second best choice for each party. Or adopt a second choice unilaterally if it is still a good option and brings other benefits in the relationship with the opponent.
- (c) Barter acceptance of proposed alternatives. For instance, from two proposed packages $\{p, q, r, s\}$ and $\{t, u, v, w\}$, adopt a package $\{p, r, t, v\}$, the elements of which are not unacceptable to each political groups but are derived from the original package of each.
- (d) Smoothen out social differences over time by rotation of the proposals.

²⁰ In contrast with the word « democracy », for which I have not arbitrated a definition.

- (e) Mutually agree to (con)federate or terminate commonality altogether (i.e. split up the community into new smaller communities according to adherence to the proposed alternatives).

It can be seen that (a)-(e) all start from the assumption that there exists opposition. Moreover, none of the described forms assumes total agreement even after the decision making process. It is also clear that consensus seeking has another political dynamic than choice set voting. The forms (a)-(c) operate logically on *content* and are dependent on the *interrelation* between actors (or proposed policy packages) rather than a *calibration* of them along numerical voting results, the calibration being the comparison with the total number of acceptable (“valid”) votes.

Consensus, as defined above, does not require equality between individuals, but it can accommodate it more easily than choice set voting. Definitions (1), (4), and (8) in chapter 3 associate “democracy” with equality (or egalitarianism). Consensus is generally far less sensitive, or not at all, to exact counting. For example in (c), where two groups may perform barter concerning two packages of items, it is of no importance for individuals within a group how big the groups are. The indicated outcome of bartered acceptance, however, would preserve equality among individuals: all have half of their enumerated desires fulfilled, *irrespective of their numerical strength* as a group. Majority voting would totally *annihilate* all wishes of all individuals in the minority.

Lehrer and Wagner (1981) provide for terminology which enables one to speak of assigning *weights* to individuals that factor in the relative importance of individuals’ contribution to a collective decision, possibly subject to revision. The majority voting Rescher advocates can be seen as a special case of such a decision procedure, where *weight zero* is assigned to people who hold a minority position, without immediate revision. Translated into this terminology, Wiredu’s point is that withholding positive weights to people on the basis of numerical strength is unjustified; cf. Lehrer and Wagner (1981: 20, 74-78).

Equality can also be realized by smoothening out differences over time by *rotation* (d). Using the example given in (c) again, a 60/40 split could result in an allocation of six years for the execution of the wishes of one group and four for those of the other over a decade, should the *demos* adhere to assigning weights according to group size. The idea of rotation is often assumed to play a rôle in majority voting systems (Bowden 2011), but these do not require it, and rotation is rarely formalized as it has been in Colombia, where a formally

constituted rotating presidency existed for a while (Lijphart 2008: 29-30). A country like the USA has known a *de facto* phenomenon of rotation, but in Mozambique there has always been a Frelimo president. The idea of rotation is applied with some frequency in Barue amongst chiefly lineages, to be discussed. Of solution (*b*) – sacrifice one’s first choice to enable a collective decision – we will encounter an ethnographic specimen in the field work material from the Chôa area, as well as of the splitting solution (*e*). Consensus cannot always be perfect, as when selecting only one leader from several candidates, but in the Chôa area example the method of assigning weights is recognizable also in such a case.

Conclusions

We have seen that such political ideas as popular selection of leaders, deposition of leaders considered bad, election, federation, representation, and the argument known as the “state-of-nature” argument, also referred to as the “social contract” idea, are not specifically Euro-American. Indeed, the Haudenosaunee idea of unity in diversity is recognized to have influenced the USA Constitution. Muslim influence on Western Europe concerning the “state-of-nature” argument is more difficult to ascertain, but at least the Muslim variants, along with the Chinese and Indian specimens, antedate the formulation by Hobbes. This makes it problematic to state categorically that “[i]deas such as ‘the state of nature,’ [...] are [...] Western philosophical notions” (Tooker 1990: 296n6). The “state-of-nature” argument is an easily demonstrated example of how an idea of political philosophy does *not* have to be specific to one culture only. Should we consider ancient China, ancient India, the Muslim world and Western Europe as distinct cultures (and nothing in the theory developed in this thesis forbids us to do so), then we can conclude that participants of these cultures either could independently develop a “state-of-nature” argument, or were able to incorporate the idea into their culture as their own, if they copied such a notion from another culture. The difference between these two hypothetical trajectories is hardly relevant for a judgement on the functioning of politics. Likewise, whether federalism in the USA was *exactly* copied from the Haudenosaunee or not is of less importance than the *recognition* by people like Franklin that projected social and political arrangements in their own societies may have similar empirical manifestations in other societies, even if one might make different choices in certain aspects when designing political arrangements. The mentioned “state-of-nature” arguments are also not all exactly the same, but they share the basic thought that people

humanistically (without divine interference²¹) desire to set up central government in order to escape social chaos. This aspect of central government of course also indicates that, even if not specific to one single culture, the idea is not universal across humanity.

It is refreshing to read Hobbes himself when he does not insist on European cultural exclusiveness, as when he writes about the Golden Rule as a general rational institution (1995: 140). To recognize value in political ideas from non-Euro-American cultures has also nothing to do with any exaltation of “noble savages”, as may be clear from Franklin’s explanations (1784). Rousseau also recommended learning from Indian American and African peoples’ enjoyment of freedom (1989: 157-158, comment XVI).

However, having established that such ideas like the popular selection of political contestants are not specifically Euro-American, we can now also establish that the idea of “choice set”, that is the idea that a “democratic” decision is equivalent to the outcome of a mathematical aggregation procedure, capable of being abstracted from argumentational interaction and specifically recommendable as such, *is* a specifically Euro-American cultural product. None of the other cultures discussed in this chapter have shown a tradition of developing mathematical theory that would be capable of mechanically determine a choice set out of submitted preference orderings, so as to declare that choice set “the choice which society would actually make” (Arrow 1963: 26). Even in a case where the idea of election seems to have had some prominence in the discussions, the Muslim case, there was no tradition of theoretical development of mathematical procedures. The same holds for reported majority voting in ancient India (cf. Muhlberger and Paine 1993). The ancient Athenians knew majoritarian voting, but as one method along with reaching consensus, lot and rotation of positions (Held 1987: 21). In the sequel of the thesis it will have to be investigated what the consequences can be when the choice set method is applied to a postconflict country such as Mozambique where such an approach may not be adaptive to the circumstances prevailing in the country.

²¹ This is including the version of Ibn Khaldūn (1950: 100-103), who refers to people outside the Muslim geographical sphere to make the point.