

Chapter 6

Two Visions of Democracy

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Abstract The current gridlock in the American federal government is caused by the equal political strength of two competing visions of democracy. The first vision, call it Type A democracy, is based on the ideal of a free self-governing individual who voluntarily contracts with other self-governing individuals to form a self-governing political association. This first vision takes individual freedom and political equality as its main ideals. The second vision of democracy, call it Type B democracy, takes economic and social equality within a nation as its main ideals. It is what emerges when the members of a pre-existing nation overcome a pre-existing hierarchical authoritarian patriarchal order and install a democratic government. Section 6.2 explores the differences between the two visions. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 sketch the historical roots of the two visions in America. Section 6.5 suggests ways of resolving the conflict between the two visions in the American political system and points out the need for Type A and Type B democrats to cooperate in opposing the hierarchical authoritarians who are the enemies of both visions of democracy.

6.1 Introduction¹

The current gridlock in the American federal government is caused by the equal political strength of two competing visions of democracy and democratic citizenship, each vision having tens of millions of adherents. My aim in this essay is to describe these two visions, not to argue for one or the other.

¹ Versions of this essay were given as lectures at the University of Kiel and the University of Luneburg in Germany on June 6th and June 12th, 2012. Those lectures were sponsored by the Hamburg Consulate of the United States State Department and the German-American Society of Kiel. I am grateful for their support and for the questions and comments received from the

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Three initial points should be kept in mind. First, the assertions in this essay are at best statistically true as in the example: men are taller than women. That statement is statistically true even though there are billions of women taller than billions of men. Second, this essay takes a distant, high altitude view of political conflict in the United States. Just as a high altitude view of a landscape reveals the relationship of the entire forest to the mountains and the sea but not the details of particular trees, so the high-altitude view taken in this essay reveals only the largest contrasts between the two visions but not the details of all the various mixtures of the two visions. Third, although I use the issue of the government provision of individual welfare as my main illustration of the conflict between the two visions of democracy, other areas of conflict such as free speech, or conceptions of privacy, or national security could have been used.

The first vision, call it Type A democracy, takes the individual citizen as its starting point. The ideal democratic citizen is a free self-governing individual who voluntarily contracts with other equally free self-governing individuals to form a free self-governing political association. Individual freedom and political equality are primary values. As explained below, Type A democracy is rooted in Protestant Christianity. The archetypal Type A democracy is the New England town meeting where people come together as free and politically equal citizens with an equal right to speak and to vote. At town meeting, citizens collectively decide how much to tax themselves and how to spend those tax revenues on common projects and public goods. Ideally, there is no supervision from a higher political authority, or State. The town meeting does not guarantee a minimum standard of living to its members. It has no mandate to redistribute personal wealth from some town meeting members to other members. *For Type A democrats, individual poverty is the personal business of the poor person, and the poor person's family and friends.* Type A democracy is the majority view in many regions of the United States but often needs to be explained to the rest of the world.

Type A democracy is not the “individualism” that Tocqueville regarded as a serious threat to democracy (Tocqueville 1994a, 98). On the contrary, Tocqueville saw the local civic engagement required by Type A democracy as the antidote to the evils of “individualism” (1994b, 102).

Nor is Type A democracy the libertarianism which views all government as a necessary evil. Type A democrats are enthusiastic about the right kind of cooperative self-government among political equals and have historically been very skilled in substituting politics for violence and using government to advance common goals.

The second vision, call it Type B democracy, begins with a pre-existing national community of which the individual is a constituent part. The economic and social equality of individuals in that national community is the primary value. Type B

audience at each lecture. I am also indebted for their incisive comments to David Bergman, Anne Parker Bergman, Ann Cudd, Taylor Dark, Susan Gesing, Tom Ginsberg, David Kolb, David Ledbetter, Judy Ledbetter, David Parker, Jonas Parker, Annie Popkin, Dan Rosen, Sally Scholz, Nancy Schwenker and Kenneth Winston.

democracy typically emerges when the members of a pre-existing nation overcome a pre-existing patriarchal authoritarian hierarchical order and install a government that makes its primary goal the social and economic welfare of the common man and woman. *In a Type B democracy, as in a family, every member of society is entitled to a minimum standard of living.*

Type B democracy is widespread around the world. It is what the Japanese and British, French, Egyptians, Germans, and Chinese generally mean by democracy. At its core, it is the abolition of pre-existing inequalities. Paternalism by government is more acceptable to Type B democrats because they see themselves as part of a nation and are used to being governed by a State comprised of the best and brightest of their fellow nationals. *The Type B ideal is good government rather than self-government – government for the people rather than government by the people.* As explained below, the strength of Type B democracy in the United States dates only from the early twentieth century.

Type B democracy is not communism or even socialism. Type B democracy does not advocate communal ownership of property or even government ownership of the means of production. Type B democracy always includes ways by which a government unsatisfactory to the majority can be replaced without violence. The archetypal Type B democracy is the modern European nation-state in which traditional economic and social inequalities have been overcome by democracy.

Both types of democracy take equality as fundamental. Type A democracy favors political equality. Type B democracy favors social and economic equality. Both types of democracy are sophisticated forms of government concerned with the common good, but they define the common good in very different ways.

6.2 Type A and Type B Democracy Contrasted

Although it is possible to find evidence of Type A democracy in countries other than the United States, the United States is an outlier compared with other major democracies in that only in the United States is Type A democracy a major political force. The differences between Type A and Type B democracy are easiest to see in the American context.

One dramatic difference between the two types of democracy is that Type A democrats draw a sharp distinction between the personal duties and obligations they owe to their families and close friends, and the civic duties they owe to their fellow citizens. To their fellow citizens, they owe the duty to participate in the self-governing political associations they belong to as fellow citizens. They have a duty to follow the laws created by agreed-upon procedures, to pay taxes, to vote, and to serve on juries. In extreme cases, they may have a civic duty to die in defense of their country.

To their own families and close friends, Type A democrats believe that they have much more extensive duties of care. Depending on the personal relationship, they may have duties of care to provide housing, food, education, medical care,

and emotional support to children, parents, relatives, and close friends. Their civic duties to their fellow citizens do not include meeting those needs.

Type A democrats do not lack compassion for the poor and needy; rather, they believe that compassion should be exercised by private individuals performing charitable acts, or by charitable organizations and religious institutions. Local government might also provide temporary assistance to local needy people for the public good of forestalling local crime or homelessness.

Type A democrats take pride in not being objects of charity. Typically, they feel ashamed to be on welfare. Even being supported by unemployment insurance makes them feel guilty for not being a fully responsible citizen able to take care of themselves. In America, programs such as Social Security (federal old age pensions) and Medicare (federal old age medical care) are rationalized by older Type A democrats as benefits they have paid for themselves rather than as transfer payments to them from younger Americans.

For Type A democrats, a democracy is similar to a voluntary club that free, responsible, and self-governing individuals establish with their fellow citizens to do the things they cannot do by themselves. Citizens hire the president, senators, representatives, judges, bureaucrats, and soldiers to serve the public as employees, as public servants. At the local level, the citizens hire police, firemen, teachers, and other public employees to serve their immediate local needs. Whom the citizens hire is determined by elections and other agreed-upon procedures. There is no concept of The State as the Europeans, Japanese, or most of the rest of the world, defines The State.

Type A democrats are willing to tax themselves and spend public money on public goods such as roads or parks, law enforcement, and national defense and often see free or inexpensive elementary, secondary, and university education as a public good. But Type A democrats draw a sharp distinction between a civil right that all citizens have to equal access to public schools established as public goods and a personal right to be educated. It is parents, family, and close friends that have the duty to see that the individual child is educated. Education is a privilege that the polity can choose to offer because an educated citizenry benefits the entire polity, but Type A democrats do not think that each individual has a right to an education that the democratic polity is duty-bound to provide at public expense. The same applies to housing, food, medical care, and emotional support.

Type A democrats can endorse governmental rules and regulations that benefit poor people. For example, the Tenement Law passed in New York City in the year 1901, requiring that indoor toilets be available to all tenement dwellers, transformed the lives of tens of thousands of people for the better (Wikipedia 2013e, New York State Tenement Law). The Tenement Law benefitted not only those tenement dwellers. It sharply reduced the incidence of infectious diseases such as cholera in the entire city. Type A democrats can support public improvements that may benefit people unequally. What is anathema to Type A democrats is using public funds to pay people's rent. Type A democrats argue that paying some peoples' rent is to treat them as dependents rather than as self-respecting politically equal citizens. Type A democrats would argue that if a paternalistic New York City government had

supplied public housing in 1901 rather than just regulate housing as it did, that provision of a basic necessity to some of the poor but not all of the poor would have destroyed community unity and the ability of the tenement dwellers to band together in Type A style to help themselves as in fact they did.

Unlike Type A democracy, Type B democracy is founded on a pre-existing nation or community of which the individual is a constituent part. For Type B democrats, the welfare of the community is inseparable from the basic welfare of each individual member of the community. Type B democrats see the provision, or at least the guarantee, of education, housing, food, medical care, and emotional support for the individual as one of the chief purposes of government. Type B democratic political leaders often use metaphors of family to describe democracy. As Barack Obama, a Type B democrat, said on the night after he was first elected president, “[Americans share]...the belief that while each of us will pursue our own individual dreams, we are an American family, and we rise or fall together as one nation and as one people” Obama (2008).

Type A democrats see political metaphors of family as inherently hierarchical and undemocratic. Type B democrats are fond of saying that one can judge a democratic government by how the poorest fare under its rule. Type A democrats see governmental paternalism as a direct threat to political equality.

6.3 The Origins of Type A Democracy in America

It is easy to understand why the rest of the world defines democracy as social and economic equality and the elimination of pre-existing inequalities. The hard question is why so many Americans are so wedded to Type A democracy. Why is political equality more important to many Americans than economic equality? *Why are so many Americans so accepting of the economic inequalities that result from their democratic practices?*

To find an answer to these questions, we must return to a time 150 years before the writing of the United States Constitution. When the English colonies on the East Coast of North America were founded in the early 1600s, they were replicas of the English societies of their time. Even in the Puritan colonies of New England, high-born people sat in the front pews and the low-born sat in the back of the church. Many leaders of the separate 13 colonies, especially in the Puritan colonies of New England and the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania, were religious dissenters who believed in the direct relationship of each individual to a judgmental God, with each individual responsible only to God for the state of his or her immortal soul. No intervening church or secular authority which could assume that responsibility for the individual. Individual freedom of conscience and freedom to act in accord with one's conscience were essential to eternal salvation. This deep belief in the necessity of freedom of conscience for every person was the basis for a social order in which individuals had extraordinary freedom to shape their own lives. Seven generations (140 years) of isolation from England and virtually unlimited land and

economic opportunity eroded social hierarchy and produced colonial societies often wealthier than England itself and yet characterized by a social and economic equality unique in the 1770s.

Although there were important social and economic differences between the 13 colonies—and a great deal of anti-democratic patriarchal authoritarian hierarchy embedded in their institutions—all of the colonies could be characterized as self-governing communities comprised of self-governing individuals. Slaves, the very poor, and most women excepted, people were accustomed to running their individual lives. They were also used to coming together in open town meetings in New England, and in elected councils and legislatures in the other colonies, to govern themselves collectively. These traditions of individual self-determination and collective self-government came into fundamental conflict with a more hierarchical authoritarian non-democratic England. The result was the American Revolution and political independence.

The American Revolution was not a rising of the poor against the rich. It bore little resemblance to the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Communist Revolution in China, or to any rising of the oppressed against the oppressor. It was a war for independence led by the richest and most influential men of the colonies fighting against rule by the richest and most influential men in a distant mother country. It was not an attempt to found a Type B democracy, or to establish social and economic equality (Arendt 1963).

After seven perilous years under the Articles of Confederation, many of the richest and most influential citizens of the newly independent 13 American States recognized the need for closer cooperation. The problem was how to have an effective government on a continental scale that would not threaten the individual liberty and local self-government they had grown used to and had fought England to maintain. The answer to this question was the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution of the United States establishes a Type A democracy. There are no guarantees in the United States Constitution of a basic standard of living, education, housing, or health care for each individual. There are no guarantees of economic or social equality.

This founding of a new political entity uniting the 13 newly independent states under a new Constitution was more like the formation of the European Union than the foundation of a new social and economic order. People already had Type A democracy in their several states. They felt no need for Type B democracy. They needed to give limited powers to a central government for certain limited purposes. The federal government was not intended to replace the government they had in their own states.

Because land was plentiful and economic opportunity great, and because the United States was an artificial entity, a political association, it has been possible to add tens of millions of new members over the past 220 years. New Americans were not asked to renounce their religion, their customs, or their history. They were not asked to become members of a tightly-knit community other than the ethnic or religious communities to which they already belonged. They were asked to subscribe to Type A democracy and to support the Constitution. Their

connection to the United States was primarily a matter of political allegiance. The overarching system of Type A democracy allowed many of the more communal groups of immigrants, whether Mennonites, Chinese, Irish Roman Catholics, Sicilian Italians, Russian Jews, or Japanese Buddhists to live together as separate groups in relative peace.

In most nation-states, for example, Japan, China, England, France, Germany, or Sweden, it is a common cultural nationality that holds the country together. Because the people of the United States have no common cultural nationality, the United States is little more than the American legal-political system.

If the Constitution were overthrown, and American democracy replaced by a national dictatorship that destroyed democracy at the federal, state, and local levels, all that would be left would be disparate ethnic groups with their own customs, a number of regional cultures, a variety of economic marketplaces, private families, and individual lives, all bound together by an authoritarian government. The result would resemble the Hapsburg Empire more than a modern nation-state (Woodard 2012).

6.4 The Origins of Type B Democracy in America

If Type A democracy has historically been the primary form of democracy in America, why is Type B democracy now so powerful? The modern Democratic Party and President Obama are primarily Type B democrats. What is the origin of the power of Type B democracy in America?

Between the Civil War and the First World War, the United States underwent industrialization on a massive scale. There was a tsunami of immigration, mostly from Europe, of more than 25,000,000 people between the end of the Civil War and the outbreak of World War I. The population grew from 31,000,000 in 1860 to 92,000,000 in 1910 (Wikipedia 2013a, *Demographic*). The total GDP grew by a factor of 5 (Wikipedia 2013c, *List*). The GDP per capita more than doubled (Wikipedia 2013b, *File*).

This huge increase in wealth was distributed very unequally. The period of the 1890's was called the Gilded Age. And the Gilded Age led to the Progressive Era, the historic root of Type B Democracy in America.

Virtually all of the tens of millions of immigrants who flocked to America before the First World War were escaping patriarchal hierarchical authoritarian social orders and many were seeking what they could not hope to establish in their homelands, Type B democracy, social and economic equality within a pre-existing community. Although socialism and communism did not find fertile soil in the United States, by the 1920s, Type B democrats comprised a majority of the electorate in highly industrialized, immigrant heavy states such as New York. The rise of Al Smith, an Irish Catholic, Governor of New York from 1923 to 1928 and the Democratic Party's nominee for president in 1928, represented the growing political power of the new immigrant citizens and their descendants.

The Great Depression brought about the election in 1932 of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, also the Governor of New York, as president. FDR's election marked the beginning of the success of the New Deal Coalition, a Type B democratic movement that was to dominate American politics for 36 years. To understand the power of the New Deal Coalition we must go back to the American Civil War which was fought from 1861 to 1865.

The two major modern American political parties were on opposite sides of the Civil War. The Republicans generally represented the winning Northern States. (Abraham Lincoln was the first president ever elected by the modern Republican Party.) The Democratic Party represented the southern states that tried and failed to secede from the United States.

As a result of the Civil War, the Republicans in the north became the dominant party in the United States from the election of Lincoln in 1860 until 1932, when Roosevelt and the New Deal Coalition took power. During that 72 year period, the minority Democratic Party held the presidency for only 16 years.

It was the Great Depression that allowed Franklin Delano Roosevelt to forge the New Deal Coalition in 1932. The Depression was for many a failure of Type A democracy. Localities and states were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the economic disaster. The New Deal Coalition was a combination of the communally minded Type B democrats descended from recent immigrants *plus* the often hierarchical anti-democratic southern Democrats who, as a result of the Civil War, were so opposed to the Republican Party that it was said that they would vote for a yellow dog before they would vote for a Republican (Wikipedia 2013d, *Yellow*). Neither wing of the New Deal Coalition was a majority of the American people, but together they dominated. During this period of dominance of Type B democracy, Social Security (the federal old-age pension plan) was enacted in 1934, and Medicare and Medicaid (the federal medical insurance plans for the old and the poor) were enacted in 1965.

With the discrediting of the Democratic Party by the Vietnam War and the upheaval of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's in which southern blacks in a non-violent movement under Martin Luther King Junior asserted their Type A civil rights, the New Deal coalition of the Type B immigrant party of the north and the losers of the Civil War in the South broke up. The Republican Party pursued a Southern Strategy of appealing to white voters upset by the successful Civil Rights Movement, combining Southerners with the more traditional Type A Republicans in the North. Initially under Richard Nixon in 1968, and then under Ronald Reagan in 1980, Type A democracy, assisted by a good measure of Southern patriarchal hierarchical authoritarianism, reasserted itself. In the period of 24 years from 1968 until 1992, only Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1976 broke the Republican hold on the White House which he held for only 4 years. His election was in part due to the disgrace of the Watergate Scandal and the fact that Carter was from Georgia.

In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton, also from the South, won the presidency. Since 1992, neither Type A or Type B democracy has been dominant. The Democratic Party has lost the Solid South. African-Americans, the major victims of pre-existing inequalities in American history, have combined with the descendants of Irish,

Italian, Jewish and, more recently, Hispanic immigrants, to form an enduring Democratic Party that is strongly Type B. The moderate Type A Republican Party that traditionally represented the West Coast States, the upper Midwest, and the Northern New England States—the heartlands of traditional Type A democracy—has faded away. The Republican Party has become the party of the old South, resisting Type B democracy but lacking the enthusiasm for collective self-government that characterized Type A democracy, to some degree realizing the fears of Tocqueville concerning “individualism.”

As the New Deal Coalition broke down, there was less and less overlap between the two parties in the House and the Senate. The moderate Type A Republican Party members from the north and the moderate Type A Democrat Party members from the South retired or were defeated in party primaries and in general elections. Traditional Type A democrats, while perhaps still a majority in the country as a whole, are now under-represented in Washington. Since 1992, both the Democratic and Republican parties have become increasingly national and disciplined and increasingly hierarchical. The national parties more closely resemble British parliamentary parties rather than the loose coalitions of state parties they used to be (Mann and Ornstein 2012).

Americans now have gridlock in the federal government between Republicans who insofar as they are not hierarchical authoritarians are Type A democrats, and Democrats who insofar as they are not hierarchical authoritarians are Type B democrats. The Type A US Constitution is designed to prevent action when the people are evenly divided. The result is a federal government in gridlock.

6.5 A Way Out of Gridlock?

No democracy of either Type A or Type B can long survive the loss of the trust and confidence of a majority of its citizens. Polling by the Pew Research Center For The People and The Press has shown the percentage of Americans trusting in the Federal Government “to do the right thing all or most of the time” has fallen from 73 % in 1958 to 26 % in 2013 (Pew 2013a, *Public Trust*).

Unfortunately, Type A and Type B democrats are often fighting one another more than their common enemies. The problem is how to find the common ground between Type A and Type B democrats so that they can ally against the patriarchy, hierarchy, and authoritarianism that still abound in the United States. I have three brief suggestions.

First, the most important common ground between Type A and Type B democrats is the concept of public goods. Take, for example, health care. Type A democrats can accept publicly funded health care for the individual if it is for the common good. For example, guaranteed health care for the young from pre-natal to age 26 can easily be viewed as a public good because a healthy population is conducive to a healthy politics and economic prosperity. The parallel is with public education.

To make possible compromise on how much individual health care can be considered a public good, Type B democrats need to abandon their position that health care is a fundamental right, not a privilege (Pear and Baker 2013).

Second, Type A democrats need to strengthen their traditional commitment to funding public goods by taxes freely self-imposed. Type A resistance to Type B democracy that takes the form of asserting that all government is waste and that taxes can never be raised plays into the hands of hierarchical authoritarians who wish to weaken democracy of either type.

Third, Type B democrats need to get over their nostalgia for the federal government of the New Deal Coalition. Type B democrats need to agree with Type A democrats that local and state governments are inherently less hierarchical and more democratic than the federal government. Recent polling by the Pew Research Center For The People and The Press shows a far greater trust in local and state government than in the federal government.² The United States is a collection of regional cultures and ethnic groups (Woodard 2012; Fischer 1989; Garreau 1981). Whenever possible, especially on the level of the welfare of the individual, local solutions tailored to local public opinion are likely to be more successful than one national solution.

For example, the United States has the best collection of colleges and universities in the world, in part because the United States has never had a system of national universities. Individual states such as California, Wisconsin, and Michigan were able to forge ahead to establish large high-quality public research universities without convincing the voters in Alabama, Wyoming, or Mississippi of the value of such public universities. In time, the success of large public research universities in the states that first adopted them caused some other states such as New York and Texas to follow suit. Some states have never funded first-rate public universities, but at least those reluctant states have not held back the states willing to forge ahead.

In the same way, well-designed single payer public health programs in some of the states with an electoral majority of Type B democrats will, if successful, encourage other states to follow suit. Health care is similar to university education in that it does not have to be on a federal scale to be successful. Indeed, trying to do universal health care for the first time as a federal initiative is likely to produce an unfortunate hybrid such as the current Obamacare (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act), riddled with special interest compromises. The argument that a morality of “good government” requires the federal government to impose a health care system on unwilling states or localities is essentially an argument for authoritarian hierarchy.

In sum, the solution to gridlock in the federal government is for Type B democrats to stop trying to use the federal government to impose Type B national

²“Even as public views of the federal government in Washington have fallen to another new low, the public continues to see their state and local governments in a favorable light. Overall, 63 % say they have a favorable opinion of their local government, virtually unchanged over recent years. And 57 % express a favorable view of their state government – a five-point uptick from last year. By contrast, just 28 % rate the federal government in Washington favorably. That is down five points from a year ago and the lowest percentage ever in a Pew Research Center survey” (Pew 2013b, *State*).

solutions on states with a majority of Type A democrats. Type B democrats have a much better chance of succeeding if they focus their efforts in the states where they have an electoral majority, and where they can demonstrate that their solutions are conducive to the common good. If Type A democrats feel less threatened by Type B democrats at the federal level, Type A democrats will be more willing to work with Type B democrats to combat the forces of inequality hostile to both types of democracy.

Both Type A and Type B democrats are advocates of democracy. They differ in the sorts of equality they think are most important. Each type of democrat tends to see only one side of their common enemies. Type B democrats, typically Democrat Party members, see clearly the danger to economic and social equality of the concentration of economic power in large corporations and the super-rich (Freeland 2012). For the United States, the dangerous concentration of wealth in the upper 10 % (or 1 %) of the population has been attacked from both the political right (Murray 2012) and the political left (Hayes 2012). Type A democrats, typically Republican Party members, see clearly the dangers of the concentration of power and the danger to political equality and personal freedom in a powerful federal welfare state. Both Type A and Type B democrats occasionally see the danger of a federal national security state (Maddow 2012; Thomas 2012). Unfortunately, Type A and Type B Democrats are often fighting one another rather than their common enemy. Those who threaten economic equality usually also threaten political equality, and vice versa. They are the same people and are the common enemy of any type of democracy.

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