Editorial

All but one of the five papers in the present volume of *Theoria* deal with aspects of one of the central thematic concerns of contemporary political theory: the deliberative and participatory arrangements optimal for democratic flourishing. The first three essays are critical responses to Cass Sunstein's treatment of democracy and deliberation in his timely and important book, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (2006). *Infotopia* enquires as to how, in the information age, we may arrive at the best, most accurate information. Sunstein assesses arrangements by which dispersed information is pooled in order to improve collective decision-making. He evaluates competing methods for aggregating information, including surveys, deliberation, markets, blogs, open source software and wikis.

Although democrats often draw attention to the epistemic benefits of deliberation, Sunstein argues forcefully that the knowledge that it generates may be compromised by the compounding of pre-deliberation errors, by informational and reputational cascade effects, by group polarisation and by the domination of shared information over unshared information. By contrast, Sunstein claims, markets are inclined to do better at producing knowledge because they give individuals strong incentives to reveal privately held knowledge and because of their superior ability in the aggregation of privately held information. Sunstein is also optimistic about the information-pooling potential of wikis and open source systems.

In his contribution, 'Rationalising Discursive Anomalies', Robert E. Goodin defends deliberation against Sunstein's claim that deliberating groups are prone to arrive at falsehood rather than truth. He examines two of the four reasons Sunstein provides for thinking that such groups often make judgements that are false or fail to take advantage of information possessed by their members: the 'Common Knowledge Effect' by which information held by the majority of group members crowds out information held by individual members and 'Group Polarisation' as a result of which groups often adopt a more extreme position that is consistent with their pre-deliberation tendency. Goodin argues that these two effects do not constitute a decisive case against group deliberation. In the case of Group Polarisation, for example, he argues with reference to an

example in which members of a jury in a tort case assess damages that polarisation might operate as a salutary corrective to initially over-cautious estimates.

Goodin contrasts the two options provided by contemporary democratic theory, aggregative democracy and deliberative democracy, with the forms of information pooling Sunstein discusses: blogs, prediction markets and wikis. On the grounds that they represent 'informational anarchy', he is sceptical about the potential of blogs to produce accurate information. We should not, he urges, depreciate politics in favour of markets just because prediction markets may be successful in tracking truth; rather, this points up the epistemic value of forms of democracy that allow people to reflect the intensity of their views. Turning his attention to wikis, he argues that they are vulnerable to epistemic distortions and deliberate manipulations. In the end, concedes Goodin, Sunstein may be correct that under certain conditions, aggregating the results of individual judgements may produce reliable knowledge. But this does not necessarily falsify the claim of deliberative democrats that reason-giving can improve decisions. We should 'perfect, not abandon' deliberative democracy.

In his article, 'On Sunstein's *Infotopia*', David Estlund defends deliberative democracy against empirical work of the sort discussed by Sunstein that purports to undermine its value, though he concedes that it is likely that, by drawing attention to the failures of deliberation, Sunstein seeks to reform rather than reject deliberative democracy. Estlund suggests that the defects of deliberation in smaller meetings, to which empirical evidence discussed by Sunstein draws attention, may not occur to the same extent in larger groups. He argues further that deliberative democrats need not entertain an exaggerated optimism about the epistemic benefits of actual deliberation. To the extent that Sunstein is claiming that Rawls and Habermas, often considered deliberative democrats, argue that in the real world (as opposed to ideal contexts) deliberation will tend towards just or accurate decision-making, Estlund believes that he is mistaken. Turning to Sunstein's use of empirical literature on deliberation, he argues that Sunstein unfairly interprets it against deliberation; in many of the studies to which Sunstein refers a better decision would be reached after deliberation rather than in its absence. Estlund does not deny the presence of pathologies and pitfalls in deliberative procedures, but he stresses that in general 'the deliberative solution will out-perform the non-deliberative one'. Like Goodin, he thinks that defects in deliberation call for its improvement rather than its abandonment.

Gerry Mackie, in his paper ‘Astroturfing Infotopia’, argues that much of Sunstein’s pessimism about group discussion and optimism about prediction markets is misplaced and that markets should not replace deliberation. He argues that the four problems with group discussions that Sunstein identifies would not affect ideal deliberation and that in many cases these flaws in actual discussions can be identified and remedied, or their effects mitigated. Mackie claims that the experiments concerning discussion to which Sunstein refers inaccurately measure the effects of persuasion on attitude change. *Infotopia*’s focus on deliberation experiments directed at manifest, direct or immediate changes in single attitudes may fail to detect what evidence produced by the ‘minority influence’ school of social psychology shows: latent direct and delayed change in attitude networks in response to persuasion.

Mackie provides evidence in addition that Sunstein’s proposed substitutes or complements to group discussion—prediction markets, wikis, open source software and blogs—are vulnerable to opportunistic manipulation as well as unexpected contingencies and market bias. Contrary to what infotopians think, prediction markets, Mackie suggests, are often no more accurate than prediction polls and at times—he provides as an example information concerning ‘evidence’ of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 2003—they fail abysmally. The comparative democratic egalitarianism of the internet may be undermined as corporate actors resort to ‘astroturfing’ (the use of paid agents to create a false impression of popular sentiment) and other stealth devices.

The fourth and fifth papers in this issue stand outside of the debate conducted with Sunstein by the first three. In his essay, ‘(I’ve Never Met) a Nice South African’: Virtuous Citizenship and Popular Sovereignty’, Lawrence Hamilton takes up the issue of how the potential of democracy can better be realised in post-apartheid South Africa. The claim that underpins his argument is that popular sovereignty is a necessary condition of virtuous citizenship. Citizens must have effective control over society’s general laws: they must be permitted to participate on an equal footing in the collective decisions that determine the terms of their association. Drawing on the republican tradition and Rousseau in particular, he argues that citizens’ freedom depends on their participation in democratic politics. Contrary to commentators who think that representative democracy in large, contemporary nation-states is necessarily inconsistent with Rousseau’s account of popular sovereignty, Hamilton insists that it is possible to

instantiate popular sovereignty in modern nation-states since it does not require constant participation by citizens in the affairs of government, but only periodic participation ‘in the exercise of power or the formulation of general laws’.

Focusing on South Africa, Hamilton argues that Rousseau’s conception of popular sovereignty would be satisfied if citizens were periodically to be provided with the opportunity to participate in constitutional amendment. Drawing inspiration from, but amending, Thomas Jefferson’s suggestion that a new constitutional assembly should be held every twenty years, Hamilton suggests that a plebiscite by citizens occurring over a period of one month every ten years, involving a protracted evaluation—a carnival of citizenship—should be introduced. This would have the effect of making citizens more virtuous by encouraging them to become more responsible (more concerned with the needs and interests of others as opposed to their own short-term, particular interests) and more courageous (more willing to experiment, since innovations could be tested and discarded at the next plebiscite).

In the final article in this issue, ‘Political Realism, Commerce and Moral Psychology’, Ze’ev Emmerich defends a realist approach to political theory and normative international relations, where realism signifies sensitivity to the details of actual politics. He offers a critique of the dominant strands in political theory that consider politics as domestic—as concerned with political associations such as the state—such that international concerns are taken to be derivatives of domestic ones. Questioning the logic of debates between political theorists who understand human beings abstractly, such as Rawls and Habermas, and those who view humans historically and contextually, such as Taylor and Rorty, Emmerich suggests that we should instead regard relations between the domestic and the international as mutually shaping and reinforcing. He advocates a realist conception of politics that accepts many of the claims of the ‘contextualists,’ but also subverts the prioritisation of internal over international affairs.

Emmerich advances a number of inter-related claims and arguments. First, political theory must achieve a better understanding of human moral psychology and its impact on human affairs. Second, human sentiments and human reason should no longer be considered as autonomous, but as interlinked. Third, instances of reason and sentiment are connected to the historical circumstances in which they appear and should be viewed as products of historical context. Finally, it is imperative to develop an account of the interaction

between human rationality and sentiments in the commercial world order, the emergence of which marks a break between the ancient and modern worlds.

The five papers that make up this volume represent significant contributions to debates surrounding democracy, deliberation and realism. Goodin, Estlund and Mackie, while not denying that Sunstein has identified certain problems with deliberation, agree that democratic deliberation should be improved rather than jettisoned in favour of markets. Hamilton too is concerned with the improvement of democratic arrangements, presenting as he does a strong argument for the importance of increased participation in politics on the part of citizens. Emmerich, for his part, argues that realism is required to transform 'the economy of sentiments' that has given rise to the current global financial crisis.

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ON BEHALF OF THE EDITORS