The Pathologies of Democracy: Mill and Winnicott on the Secret Ballot

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Scholars have highlighted the great disparity between polling projections and actual voter behavior in the 2016 presidential election, attributing much of this difference to the secret ballot. Many Trump supporters, for example, did not reveal their true preferences to human pollsters but did support Trump in the private voting booth. While some pundits applauded this as precisely what the secret ballot is for, others voiced disgust that the ballot had freed voters to act "irresponsibly." The 2016 election thus raised an older normative problem regarding the role of the secret ballot in modern democracies. This article seeks to better understand normative arguments for and against the secret ballot by comparing the writings of D. W. Winnicott—one of its most thoughtful defenders—and J. S. Mill—one of its most provocative critics. Winnicott and Mill both support mass democracy but share an understanding of it as inherently pathological and, oftentimes, irrational. But where Winnicott embraces the secret ballot in representative democracy as a healthy and minimally destructive means of purging citizens' irrational drives, Mill argues that an open voting system more effectively persuades, if not compels, citizens to act reasonably and virtuously when making public decisions.

The election of November 8, 2016, had its fair share of winners and losers, and arguably, none outside the Clinton war room suffered more on election night than political pollsters. As the shock surrounding Donald Trump's presidential victory sank in during the morning hours of November 9, two related questions arose: First, how had Trump managed to win this election, particularly in rust

belt states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania—the pillars of Hillary Clinton's so-called "electoral firewall"? And second, how had preelection pollsters so grossly misjudged the outcome, especially in those hotly contested states? The New York Times called it "the biggest polling miss in a presidential election in decades" (Cohn et al. 2016), while an *Atlantic* writer asked: "How did we get this thing this wrong? From the myriad polls and poll aggregators, to the vaunted oracles at Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight and the *New York Times*'s shiny forecasting interface, most serious predictors completely misjudged Trump's chances of victory" (Newkirk 2016).

Soon, experts at places such as Johns Hopkins and Stanford were discussing the limitations of big data and polling "blind spots" (Lyons 2016; Shashkevich 2016). Some attributed the error to "nonresponse bias" among likely Trump voters—less educated whites who "systematically do not respond to surveys" although they plan to vote (Mercer et al. 2016), particularly since "the more non-educated white people there are in a state, the higher the polling gap" (Kirk and Scott 2016; see also Cohn et al. 2016; Vogel and Isenstadt 2016). Still others cited as mitigating factors Clinton's sizable popular vote lead (nearly 3 million votes) and the distorting effects of the Electoral College (which Trump won by a margin of 306–232) on perceptions of electoral performance (Kurtzleben 2016).

But hovering over these explanations was a theory that struck a more sensitive political nerve, variously called the "stealth voter" or "shy voter" phenomenon, "social desirability bias," or, more symbolically, the "Reverse Bradley Effect." The Bradley Effect refers to the 1982 California gubernatorial election in which Tom Bradley, an African American candidate representing the Democratic Party, lost to Republican George Deukmejian despite having a considerable lead in many polls leading up to the election. The turn of events was explained by reluctance among white voters, perhaps fearing the appearance of racism, to reveal that they were not voting for a black candidate facing a white candidate, leading to a sizable discrepancy between polling predictions and election results. Discussion of the Bradley Effect intensified in the lead-up to the 2008 presidential election (Holmes 2008), but following Barack Obama's historic victory, scholars cited its absence as manifesting "an enormous transformation in racial attitudes and outlooks in the United States" (Bobo and Dawson 2009). Daniel Hopkins (2009) indicatively argued that while a meaningful Bradley (or "Wilder") effect existed in America up through the early 1990s, by Obama's 2008 election, the phenomenon had become highly context-dependent.

Whatever the scientific assessments, clarifying the theoretical issue is important: the Bradley Effect is *not* a purported explanation of voter behavior, nor is it purported to measure the effects of racism or racial bias on polling or voting. It is, rather, an attempt to explain a *discrepancy* between polling data and real preferences based on the systematic misrepresentation of those same

preferences to pollsters. In plain terms, the theory purports to explain a social phenomenon of mass fibbing, which may in turn reflect broader preference falsification among a significant portion of society based on factors ranging from an internalized sense of guilt or shame to the fear of external social sanctions like rejection, isolation, ostracism, and unemployment (Noelle-Neumann 1993).

From a democratic perspective, the Bradley Effect is problematic for two reasons. The first concerns the link between opinion polls and political responsiveness. As one Pew article put it on Election Night, "The role of polling in a democracy goes far beyond simply predicting the horse race. At its best, polling provides an equal voice to everyone and helps to give expression to the public's needs and wants in ways that elections may be too blunt to do. That is why restoring polling's credibility is so important" (Mercer et al. 2016). A second problem concerns the relation between the public sphere and political legitimacy. As Timur Kuran (1997) writes, "one socially significant consequence of preference falsification is … widespread public support for policies that would be rejected in a vote taken by the secret ballot … to the exclusion of alternative policies capable of commanding stable support" (18). This leads to a powerful argument for the ballot: "Because elections by secret ballot measure private opinion, polls undertaken to predict electoral outcomes will yield misleading forecasts unless respondents feel comfortable expressing themselves freely" (Kuran 1997, 341).

Indeed, systematic preference falsification and polling errors largely explained the shock surrounding Trump's presidential victory. Famously only two major polls—the USC-Dornsife-*Los Angeles Times* Daybreak and Trafalgar Group of Atlanta polls—consistently projected a Trump victory prior to Election Day, and their experts cited a so-called "Reverse Bradley Effect" as the likely source of a Trump upset. A glimpse at their methodology is revealing: The USC-*Los Angeles Times* poll differed from others in two major respects: first, by giving added weight to rural white voters who were underrepresented elsewhere; and second, by contacting respondents exclusively online rather than over the phone, which boosted Trump's numbers considerably. In the online polls, Trump voters "reported themselves as being slightly more comfortable than Clinton voters in talking to family members and acquaintances about their choice," and "were notably less comfortable about telling a telephone pollster about their vote." Moreover, "Women who said they backed Trump were particularly less likely to say they would be comfortable talking to a pollster about their vote" (Lauter 2016).

The Trafalgar Group tackled the problem of "comfort" in another way—by asking respondents, in addition to their own vote, who they thought their

neighbors were voting for. The neighbor question was crucial for estimating the so-called "hidden Trump voter." As one Trafalgar representative put it:

> [I]f you want to find out the truth on a hot topic, you can't just ask the question directly. So the neighbor is part of the mechanism to get the real answer. In the 11 battleground states, and 3 non-battleground, there was a significant drop-off between the ballot test question [which candidate you support] and the neighbors' question [which candidate you believe most of your neighbors support]. The neighbors question result showed a similar result in each state. Hillary dropped [relative to the ballot test question] and Trump comes up across every demographic, every geography. Hillary's drop was between 3 and 11 percent while Trump's increase was between 3 and 7 percent. This pattern existed everywhere from Pennsylvania to Nevada to Utah to Georgia, and it was a constant … And what we discovered is … a lot of minorities were shy voters and women were shy voters. (Fossett and Shepard 2016)

The Trafalgar Group discovered a similar mechanism in differences between live phone call and push-button (or robocall) poll results: "Every single time we polled the primary, the push-button said 4.5 points better for Trump. And obviously, we didn't know until the primary election that the push-button would always be right" (Fossett and Shepard 2016).

The Trump campaign generated a great deal of open enthusiasm, and indeed, Trump's crowds throughout the 2016 campaign were large and vocal. But after the election, the USC-*Los Angeles Times* and Trafalgar groups garnered praise for polling methods that revealed the significant number of Trump "hidden voters" in an electoral environment, which—given Trump's controversial remarks regarding a variety of groups from women and Muslims to Mexicans and immigrants, and election-level scrutiny of these remarks by media outlets and the Clinton campaign—may have harbored the impression (if not the reality) in some communities that isolation and ostracism would follow from revealing one's preference for Trump, not only among whites but also among women, minority, and educated voters—all of whom apparently voted for Trump in higher numbers than projected.

The Secret Ballot Crisis

The phenomenon of voter shyness in 2016 raised concerns about the health of American democracy. On Election Day, CNBC's Jake Novak, citing Trafalgar's prediction, paired an interesting question about America with a provocative suggestion about democracy: "What will it say about America if

Trump wins and the polls were all wrong because millions of us were literally too scared to tell pollsters, neighbors, and even family members about our voting choice? … [W]hatever we do, it's important to note that no democracy can really be healthy when too many people are afraid to even say for whom they're voting" (Novak 2016a). Novak's postelection remarks were even stronger:

> The problem was that too many people felt afraid to answer [the preelection polls] honestly. For all the focus on how nasty and offensive Trump was, there was a stronger and steadier stream of nastiness from editorials in major papers, posts on social media, and conversations in office break rooms and classrooms that bashed Trump, sometimes even equating him to Hitler. That took its toll on a lot of Trump supporters … [I]t's clear millions of Americans have been living for months in fear of saying they intended to vote for him … The 'stealth Trump vote' … was born out of a callousness and dismissive nature that's becoming more and more common in American society. (Novak 2016b)

On the other hand, Election Night coverage showed serious concern from another angle: In one memorable segment, CNN's Van Jones called Trump's victory a "whitelash against a changing country … [and] against a black president in part. And that's the part where the pain comes" (Ryan 2016). Around the same time, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews entered a heated exchange on the reasons Trump was winning:

> [Maddow:] What we've got though, the biggest number and the biggest thing that explains how Trump could maybe win the Presidency with only 29% of the Latino vote, is that he's spiked white vote. He has figured out a way to do that, and that has always been the far right's dream, that you could figure out a way to do it without minorities, in fact you could figure out a way to do it on the backs of minorities by threatening minorities in a way that make a lot of people uncomfortable but that does awaken something … basically … that's racial anxiety among whites, and that's how you win. That's been a dream on the far right. It's the Ann Coulter dream of white turnout.

> [Matthews:] Well let me give the other version of that notion and it is that, the three issues that he tapped into—trade, immigration, and wars—I think he was on the popular side of.

A heated debate ensued in which Matthews criticized Clinton for not coming out with "strong elements of a comprehensive immigration program" because "She thought she could get all the Hispanic vote without paying a price," with Maddow responding that Clinton did in fact offer a comprehensive and politically risky enforcement plan, but "What she didn't do was say 'Build a wall,' and 'Mexicans are rapists.'" Matthews concluded by emphasizing the legitimacy of Trump's issue campaign, though not his rhetoric: "I don't think it was racism," said Matthews. "The way he did it was, but I don't think the issue was," to which Maddow responded, "The way he did it … is an important part of how he did it."

Jones's and Maddow's remarks displayed more than a little disgust not just at the Trump campaign, but particularly with Trump voters, of whom a meaningful portion were reprimanded for voting, at worst, in a way that is bigoted and ethnically tribal, or at best, based on noxious anxieties provoked by racist, sexist, and demagogic rhetoric. Their votes, it was suggested, reflect the most dangerous elements of populist democracy; and their vulgar, even irrational motives lack the critical elements of enlightened reason and public-orientation that are a thriving democracy's bedrock. This gives relief to Matthews's response to Maddow—not to defend Trump voters per se, but to suggest that among many (if not most), there *was* a potentially reasonable and public-spirited motive to vote, attached to a national concern with jobs, immigration reform, and trade policy.

The hidden linchpin of this tension, I would suggest, was the effect of the secret ballot. For better or worse, the anonymity of the secret ballot made Trump's pivotal "stealth voters" comfortable with voting as they did. And in a year that saw the rise not only of the stealth Trump vote but also the stealth "Brexit" vote, in a bitter and rancorous electoral atmosphere eerily similar to that of the United States, it was relatively easy to juxtapose the liberty of the secret ballot (which typically benefitted the right) with the coercive (or corrective) power of political correctness (typically attached to the left), and to place them on opposite sides of a populist–liberal divide.

As early as July 2016, for example, in the wake of Britain's stunning and poll-busting vote to leave the European Union, conservative columnist Stella Morabito offered a historical connection between "mobster-style" control of public opinion (a proxy for "political correctness") and corresponding historical anxieties among elites that the secret ballot would undermine their control over political discourse and outcomes: "Political correctness," wrote Morabito, "always suppresses certain 'incorrect' opinions in public. We feel it constantly in the media, on college campuses, and throughout popular culture. But what about in private? … The idea that ordinary citizens can decide big questions in the privacy of a voting booth shielded from fear of retribution has always been

anathema to power-mongering elites" (Morabito 2016). Thus, in Britain, while "Intimidation was the hallmark of the Remain camp's propaganda that equated Brexit voters with ignorance and bigotry" (Morabito 2016), in June 2016 the secret ballot allowed the hidden majority to overcome these pressures. Morabito then cites examples ranging from "optional" secret ballots in Fairfax, Virginia, to the online publication of petition signatures on both sides of same-sex marriage initiatives, to a 2012 article called "Abolish the Secret Ballot" in *The Atlantic* (Issenberg 2012)—as evidence of an insidious tendency toward undermining the secret ballot to support a liberal agenda.

Conversely, others linked recent electoral results via the secret ballot to the broader legitimization of political bigotry, irrationality, and irresponsibility in what Pankal Mishra called a new "age of anger" (Mishra 2016, 2017). As early as November 25, 2016, *Politico*'s Charles Sykes wrote that "Trump's victory means that the most extreme and irresponsible voices on the right now feel emboldened and empowered. And more worrisome than that, they have an ally in the White House" (Sykes 2016). And David Niewert charged Trump's campaign with "mainstreaming of alt-right ideology … [and having] an invigorating effect on an older generation of white nationalists" (Neiwert 2017). From this perspective, the secret ballot had proved a catalyst for gathering noxious political forces, hitherto isolated and enervated by shame and public opinion, into a critical mass.

In sum, the range of emotional reactions to the 2016 election raised old but oft-forgotten questions: *What potentially harmful—rather than healthful— forces might the secret ballot release? Is the secret ballot necessarily best for democracy? What are the tensions between healthy democracy and the secret ballot, and how are these resolved?* For generations such questions had laid dormant in popular discourse and only occasionally tackled by social scientists. "The secret vote, many believe, is the jewel in the democratic crown," wrote Brennan and Pettit (1990, 311), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948, Art. 21, sec. 3) indicatively places "secret vote" alongside "universal and equal suffrage" as a basic human right (Crook and Crook 2007, 449–50). Robert Dahl, an authority on the topic, writes that "Although open voting still has a few defenders, secrecy has become the general standard; a country in which it is widely violated would be judged as lacking free and fair elections" (Dahl 2000, 96).

But this normative conclusion is hardly epistemological. Citing a recent surge in critical histories of the secret ballot, Crook and Crook (2011, 200) argue that "Rather than view it as the necessary product of political idealism and linear, global progress, we should instead regard the secret ballot as the contingent outcome of diverse struggles, specific to time and place." Today's natural presumptions about democracy were once debatable issues, and the

question of open or closed voting (among others) generated immense controversy in places such as England, France, and the United States throughout the nineteenth century during modern democracy's "first wave" of expansion (Buchstein 2015; Crook and Crook 2007, 2011; Huntington 1991, 16–17; Kinzer 1978b; Park 1931; Theuns 2017). These were formative years in national and transnational understandings of representative democracy, and a variety of contingent factors—"sectional party interests, logistical considerations, contested political ideals, and technological innovations," to say nothing of foreign example (Crook and Crook 2011, 200)—steered and shaped the physiognomy of these debates.

These same social, ideological, logistical, and technological factors, and the democratic tensions they negotiate, remain as variable and important today as during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even if many of the underlying *questions* they implicate (including the secret ballot) remain latent at a time of apparent consensus. But if ours is indeed a moment of democratic crisis, then it is during such times that important questions are recovered; and there is, as Hannah Arendt (1993) wrote, the "opportunity, provided by the very fact of crisis—which tears away facades and obliterates prejudices—to explore and inquire into whatever has been laid bare of the essence of the matter" (174).

Debating the Ballot: Liberal, Republican, and Pathological Voices

In recent years a select number of political scientists have reopened discussion on the merits of open and closed voting systems (Barbalet 2002; Brennan and Pettit 1990; Elster 2015; Engelen and Nys 2013; Theuns 2017). In a useful summary, for example, Theuns distinguishes three nineteenth-century arguments for and against the secret ballot. The former arguments are well known: the secret ballot protects voters from outside intimidation, offers an accurate aggregation of free voter preferences, and protects a voter's privacy. On the other hand, open voting has been favored on republican moral grounds: it would compel citizens to vote in "communally and socially acceptable" ways (Theuns 2017, 503), and it would encourage greater social responsibility. Open voting also facilitates effective political mobilization by revealing genuine allies and antagonists. Thus, for a time, open voting, traditionally understood to favor entrenched upper-class influences, was preferred even by British Chartists representing the working class (Barbalet 2002, 131; Theuns 2017, 497).

Novel arguments have also appeared. In a trailblazing piece, Brennan and Pettit (1990) argued that a modified open voting system—which "unveiled the vote" without actually recording it—is today preferable to closed voting for two reasons. First, if the ballot's traditional advantage has centered on eliminating corruption, intimidation, and bribery—thus ensuring an accurate tally of voter

preferences—then, in practice, the slim chance of casting a pivotal vote actually induces capricious voting behavior: "Although he prefers *A* to *B*, this fact provides [the voter] with negligible reason to *vote* for *A*, and there may well be more weighty reasons for him to vote otherwise" (Brennan and Pettit 1990, 322). Subsequently, because concrete preferences over electoral outcomes are ineffectual, they are crowded out by more arbitrary "posture preferences": "a preference for seeing himself as a *B*-voter rather than an *A*-voter perhaps; or a preference for being on the side that is probably going to win; or a preference for being able candidly to report that he voted *B*" (Brennan and Pettit 1990, 321).

On the other hand, an open voting scheme exacerbates this problem of "posture preferences," but with the transfigurative advantage of elevating a "judgment ideal" of voting whereby voters prioritize the public good over private interests. "[P]eople are more likely to vote according to their judgment if a preference for voting in a discursively defensible manner dominates their decision-making," Brennan and Pettit argue. "[A] way to ensure the dominance of such a discursive preference is by unveiling the vote: by relaxing in some measure the existing rule of secret voting" (Brennan and Pettit 1990, 323–24). The causal mechanism is simple: "if the vote is unveiled the desire for social acceptance will play a larger role in your decision as to how to vote; and in a pluralistic society the surest way of winning acceptance will be to vote in a way you can discursively support" (Brennan and Pettit 1990, 326).

Bernard Manin and John Ferejohn respond with traditional defenses of the secret ballot and fresh nuances. Manin (2015) points out, for example, that the most likely audience of open voting is not the "broad public," but rather a small, self-selecting, and especially influential (if not outright coercive) group of close associates including friends, family, professional relations, and neighbors (211). Meanwhile, Ferejohn (2015) argues that combining closed voting in elections with private deliberations in Congress protects citizen privacy while also enabling Congress to discuss seriously (i.e., without constituent pressure) issues concerning the general public good.

Still others have proposed inventive combinations. To maximize voter "responsibility" and "autonomy," Vermeule (2015) proffers a two-step "open-secret" or "second opinion" concept: "The hope is that the open vote will represent an aggregation of maximally responsible judgments, the secret vote an aggregation of maximally autonomous ones, and that both will be informative, both for voters and other actors" (227). In a much different attempt to enhance the salience of deliberative democracy, Engelen and Nys (2013) seek to combine closed-ballot voting with a small but real prospect of deliberative accountability to one's citizen peers—a so-called "Justification Day."

Whatever the approach, a consistent theme runs through these articles—a tension between what Ferejohn calls the "liberal aspects" and "republican

aspects" of modern democracy. The former prioritizes individual freedom, privacy, and personal preferences, while the latter is willing to compromise these things (at least somewhat) on behalf of the broader public good. For Brennan and Pettit, for example, this tension exists in theory between the liberal "preference ideal" and republican "judgment ideal" of voting, which they resolve quaintly by declaring one impossible and the other not. Vermeule frames the issue as a tension between liberal "autonomy" in private and republican "responsibility" when observed, and he resolves the tension by having separate "liberal" and "republican" votes and comparing the results. Ferejohn, as we have seen, explicitly adopts the language of liberalism and republicanism to steer his project. And Engelen and Nys tacitly distinguish liberal and republican viewpoints based on attitudes toward shame: If liberals "value the right of privacy because it gives us some control over the disclosure of [shameful] things," then the republican approach recognizes and embraces that "Shame, in short, can be a strong incentive for helping people to improve their moral character and behavior" (Engelen and Nys 2013, 499–500).

This turn to shame as a theoretical linchpin is timely. In 2016 shame was salient in both the reluctance of some voters to reveal their preferences (or judgments) to others, and in the emotional response of opponents to their votes. While some were disgusted by what they saw as shameful political rhetoric, on Election Day others felt uniquely protected from public shaming. So, in the presence of hidden voters, the hidden question was this: Should democratic citizens be *shamed* into behaving in socially acceptable or "politically correct" ways? Where should the line of public pressure begin and end? Should greater protections of free expression exist in the public sphere? And, should the shielding necessarily extend to the voting booth, where private acts have public consequences?

As we have seen, to date discussions of the secret ballot have reflected a clear divide between liberal and republican perspectives on this question. But a third approach—which I call the *pathological* approach, is also possible and useful. This framework is grounded on three basic premises: First, the fortress principle of modern representative democracy is universal adult suffrage. Second, universal suffrage (i.e., the emancipation of the masses) brings with it certain risks and pathologies. And third, the quality of representative democracy—in terms of stability, public policy, and overall representativeness—requires mitigating these risks while minimizing the damage done to democratic institutions.

The remainder of this article demonstrates this approach from two distinct angles via the writing of two very different English theorists—political philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) and Freudian psychologist Donald W. Winnicott (1896–1971). Mill and Winnicott both embraced universal

suffrage while acknowledging its certain pathologies, and they subsequently pursued creative ways to embrace the democratic masses while hedging against their stereotypical vices. As we will see, contemporary concerns with democratic populism are hardly novel, and indeed, they share much in common with mid-nineteenth-century republican concerns about vulgarizing or corrupting the vote, and late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fears of irrational "mob democracy" (Buchstein 2015; Zaretsky 2016). These were precisely the contexts in which Mill and Winnicott wrote.

For reasons that are interesting today, they also land on opposite sides of the secret ballot debate. To anticipate, Mill argued that the open ballot is not just a viable antidote to the pathologies of universal suffrage, but the most effective means of embracing the emancipated working class. Meanwhile, much of Winnicott's political writing occurred in the aftermath of World War II and the rise of populist European fascism. With appreciation for the enduring British democracy, Winnicott rejected open voting as a source of mass repression that might easily elevate demagogues to satisfy citizens' emotional needs. Instead, he argued that the secret ballot safely purges citizens of precisely those political emotions that, even if shameful, must ultimately find expression. Repression via public pressure does not insulate democracy from the irrational or mean passions of the masses—it only diverts those passions to more dangerous and undemocratic channels.

John Stuart Mill on Universal Suffrage and Open Voting

John Stuart Mill's stature among the canonical theorists of representative democracy is well established. Mill was the nineteenth century's most powerful advocate of libertarian freedom and basic human equality, and his popular standing among democratic theorists derives largely from his utilitarian defense of liberty and legal rights (*On Liberty*, 1859; *Utilitarianism*, 1861) and his radical call for women's equality in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869). Mill's most sustained examination of modern democratic institutions is his 1861 *Considerations on Representative Government*. But for several reasons, among them Mill's unabashed intellectual elitism and highly unfashionable justification of nineteenth-century British imperialism and paternalistic despotism (Jahn 2005; Sullivan 1983; Tunick 2006), it is arguably his most underappreciated democratic work.

Mill's life spanned a dynamic period in the expansion of British democracy. As a young Philosophical Radical, Mill saw passage of the British Great Reform Act of 1832, which extended the vote to small property holders (though not the working class, or even a large percentage of the middle class) and established a system of representation more closely linked to actual population distribution—

to wit, the act eliminated entirely the representation of fifty-six "rotten boroughs" and transferred a large number of seats from less densely populated to more densely populated urban areas. In this context of primitive suffrage expansion, Mill adamantly supported the secret ballot, writing several articles on its behalf throughout the 1830s (see Kinzer 1978a). By the late 1850s, however, Mill would change his stance on the secret ballot, a fact that scholars have long sought to explain.

Bruce Kinzer (1978a), for example, argues that "Mill's commitment to secret voting in the thirties was not of an abstract character. Its value was understood strictly within the context of the struggle to establish a viable radical party and to undermine aristocratic political influence" (22). The 1832 Reform Act had failed to solidify the Whig majority in the House of Commons—indeed, the liberal Whigs were actually *losing* ground—and these losses in turn were blamed internally on "the concessions already made to the radicals" (ibid, 24). Mill thus hoped the issue of the ballot (if not also its passing) would not only cement the Whig majority but reenergize and elevate the more radical wing within the party. But when these goals proved elusive, he abandoned the cause.

Buchstein (2015) explains Mill's transformation differently as a function of changing class relations in England. Mill favored the secret ballot in the 1830s in the context of entrenched aristocratic privilege and influence over middle-class voters. But by the late 1850s, conditions had changed, and most voters were free and independent:

> According to Mill, direct personal dependencies have disappeared in the course of England's newer societal development. The social upheavals of the past and the current social changes are doing away with the main reasons that could have been put forward in favor of secret balloting. For example, direct external influence on voters via servitude, leasehold, and rent has been declining steadily for several decades in England, which leads him to a general sociological conclusion: "[I]n the more advanced states of modern Europe, and especially in this country, the power of coercing voters has declined and is declining." … According to Mill, England's social structure had become so mobile and flexible that electoral policy could and should focus wholly on the positive effects of public voting. (Buchstein 2015, 32–33)

In this context, it is significant that *Considerations on Representative Government* was published amid heated debates in England over further expansion of the vote to the English working class, for a tension surrounding the working-class vote pervades the treatise, and Mill's arguments anticipated what would soon become the Reform Act of 1867, which "extended the vote to

most male householders and nearly doubled the electorate from roughly one to two million out of nearly seven million adult males in England and Wales" (Butler 2017, 58). Throughout *Considerations*, Mill thus attempted a delicate balancing act—between his radical and hardly universal enthusiasm for the democratic idea of universal suffrage on one hand, and his concern over how such a reform would affect the quality of democratic institutions on the other. Mill lauded political equality and celebrated the tapering of aristocratic privilege. But he prioritized the public good, and for this reason, he abandoned the secret ballot in favor of both open and plural voting.

One can better appreciate Mill's support of open and plural voting—institutions that today seem antithetical to democracy—by first considering why he supported representative democracy at all. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill argued that the best political system, all else being equal, should be judged based on two interacting criteria—a "twofold division of the merit which any set of political institutions can possess"—which "consists partly of the degree in which they promote the general mental advancement of the community, including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency; and partly of the degree of perfection with which they organize the moral, intellectual, and active worth already existing, so as to operate with the greatest effect on public affairs" (Mill 1998, 229).

In brief, governments exist (a) to make citizens morally and intellectually better, and (b) to maximize the use of this moral and intellectual talent for the public good. But the quality of citizens stands central: "If we ask ourselves on what causes and conditions good government in all its senses, from the humblest to the most exalted, depends," wrote Mill, "we find that the principal of them, the one which transcends all others, is the qualities of the human beings composing the society over which the government is exercised" (Mill 1998, 225). Mill subsequently argues that of all known political systems, representative democracy is most conducive to these ends. It is effective at producing virtuous and educated citizens, because responsible political participation in an open society naturally cultivates citizens' moral and intellectual development; subsequently, it is effective at utilizing these talents for the public precisely because political participation is open to all.

To highlight the representative system's advantage in this regard, Mill discounts the benevolent rule even of eminently wise despots. Even assuming that Platonic philosopher kings existed, for example, Mill argues that under their rule, "Endeavor is even more effectually restrained by the certainty of its impotence, than by any positive discouragement." A philosopher king's rule, even if benevolent, would stunt citizens' moral and intellectual growth by shielding them from public responsibility and reducing their incentive to

cultivate an understanding of public affairs. But "Very different," said Mill, "is the state of the human faculties where a human being feels himself under no other external constraint than the necessities of nature, or mandates of society which he has his share in imposing, and which it is open to him, if he thinks them wrong, publicly to dissent from, and exert himself actively to get altered" (1998, 253). Moreover, wrote Mill:

> The maximum of the invigorating effect of freedom upon the character is only attained, when the person acted on either is, or is looking forward to becoming, a citizen as fully privileged as any other. What is still more important than even this matter of feeling, is the practical discipline which the character obtains, from the occasional demand made upon the citizens to exercise, for a time and in their turn, some social function. It is not sufficiently considered how little there is in most men's ordinary life to give any largeness either to their conceptions or to their sentiments. Their work is routine … Giving him something to do for the public, supplies, in a measure, all these deficiencies. (Mill 1998, 254)

But this raises a practical problem. For if maximizing citizen participation is key to representative democracy's success, and yet a significant proportion of the citizen body (even a majority of it) enters the forum deficient in one essential manner or another—perhaps they are uninformed or uneducated, inexperienced or narrow-minded, limited in perspective to one's own class or region—then how, despite this, can one ensure that public policy will veer toward the impartial public interest? How can one maximize citizen participation while also maximizing democratic performance and the greater public good?

To address this problem, Mill offered four different proposals, at least three of which compromise his enthusiastic embrace of universal adult suffrage (including women). The first, ironically, is to restrict that suffrage, presumably to a very limited extent, based on particular criteria including basic math and literacy tests and minimal property requirements. There ought, said Mill, to be "no persons disqualified, except through their own default," but "I regard it as wholly inadmissible that any person should participate in the suffrage, without being able to read, write, and, I will add, perform the common operations of arithmetic," even when "society has not performed its duty, by rendering this amount of instruction accessible to all," because "universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement" (Mill 1998, 329–30). One also cannot vote while receiving "parish relief," because "He who cannot by his labour suffice for his own support, has no claim to the privilege of helping himself to the money of others" (332).

Here, we see the tension of Mill's thought fully, for while denying the vote to the poor and illiterate on prudential grounds, he also acknowledged a significant public loss, for:

> It is by political discussion that the manual laborer, whose employment is routine, and whose way of life brings him in contact with no variety of impressions, circumstances, or ideas, is taught that remote causes, and events which take place far off, have a most sensible effect on his personal interests; and it is from political discussion, and collective political action, that one whose daily occupations concentrate his interests in a small circle around himself, learns to feel for and with his fellow citizens, and becomes consciously a member of a great community (Mill 1998, 328).

Political participation is critical not only to the freedom and liberty of democratic citizens, but to the very self-cultivation that makes their participation effective. Thus, for the vast majority of cases above poverty and illiteracy, and where education or experience may vary significantly, Mill offers a different solution—the "plural vote"—which extends the suffrage broadly (thus enabling most citizens to participate) while giving added influence (i.e., a "plural vote") to more qualified voters. The right to a plural vote would be merit-based, either on public examination or on other proxies of education such as university degrees or years of experience in certain liberal professions. Notably, Mill was unmoved by criticism that this system is undemocratic: "I do not look upon equal voting as among the things which are good in themselves," he wrote (1998, 340), because voting systems are a means to an end. Rather than undermine the radical call for universal adult suffrage, plural voting supports it: "Entire exclusion from a voice in the common concerns, is one thing: the concession to others of a more potential voice, on the grounds of greater capacity for the management of the joint interests, is another" (Mill 1998, 335).

Similar reasoning grounds Mill's proposal for filling a Second Chamber of parliament. Though Mill "set little value on any check which a Second Chamber can apply to a democracy otherwise unchecked" (1998, 384), he suggested that an ideal Second Chamber would model the Roman Senate:

> If one House represents popular feeling, the other should represent personal merit, tested and guaranteed by actual public service, and fortified by practical experience. If one is the People's Chamber, the other should be the Chamber of Statesmen; a council composed of all living public men who have passed through important political offices or employments. Such a chamber would be fitted for much more than

to be a merely moderating body. It would not be exclusively a check, but an impelling force. (Mill 1998, 388)

As a third prudential measure, finally, Mill rejected the secret ballot categorically and argued for an open ballot process which would subject individual voters to public scrutiny. Here, Mill strayed especially far from contemporary democratic sensibilities, for the vote, he argued, is not a private "right" to exercise but a public "trust" to treat others fairly. As Nadia Urbinati (2002, 111) writes, for Mill, "Insofar as voting was not simply a self-regarding action, it had to be judged according to the harm principle," and thus "when he focused on consequences of voting, and emphasized its power to influence the lives of others *directly*, Mill concluded that the vote should not be treated simply as a self-regarding action." Voting exists not for citizens to privately or irresponsibly *choose* what they *want*, but rather to enable citizens to publicly and effectually *judge* what is *best*:

> In any election, even by universal suffrage (and still more obviously in the case of a restricted suffrage), the voter is under an absolute moral obligation to consider the interest of the public, not his private advantage, and give his vote to the best of his judgment, exactly as he would be bound to do if he were the sole voter, and the election depended upon him alone. This being admitted, it is at least a prima facie consequence, that the duty of voting, like any other public duty, should be performed under the eye and criticism of the public; every one of whom has not only an interest in its performance, but a good title to consider himself wronged if it is performed otherwise than honestly and carefully. (Mill 1998, 355)

This helps explain why Mill rejected the secret ballot and embraced open voting. Subjecting voters to the scrutiny of public opinion will have one, if not two major positive effects. First, the knowledge that votes *will* be public will compel voters to consider what kind of decision would look reasonable or defensible to their citizen peers. At minimum, the threat of social sanctions will deter actions that one senses will be publicly indefensible: "Even the bare fact of having to give an account of their conduct, is a powerful inducement to adhere to conduct of which at least some decent account can be given" (Mill 1998, 360). Second, and more auspiciously, the open vote will encourage all, but particularly those who anticipate public criticism, to defend their votes with arguments and counterarguments that then enter and enrich the public sphere. This not only improves the depth and quality of public discourse; it also enlightens public opinion through richer debate and compels citizens to cultivate

their own political understanding, if only in self-defense. "To be under the eyes of others," wrote Mill, "to have to defend oneself to others—is never more important than to those who act in opposition to the opinion of others, for it obliges them to have sure ground for their working against pressure" (1998, 360).

In the process, open voting expands on the project already begun with plural voting—to embrace a program of near universal suffrage, while mitigating its potentially deleterious effects on the overall quality of democratic participation. Where fears reasonably remain that certain lower- or middle-class perspectives will be underrepresented by this scheme, Mill suggests a fourth measure to ensure a diversity of class-based and regional representation—namely, proportional representation. As Urbinati (2002, 79–80) argues, for Mill, "where universal suffrage guaranteed that all citizens are treated equally, proportional representation tried to ensure that all views are respected":

> In a representative body actually deliberating, the minority must of course be overruled; and in an equal democracy … the majority of people, through their representatives, will outvote and prevail over the minority and their representatives. But does it follow that the minority should have no representatives at all? Because the majority ought to prevail over the minority, must the majority have all the votes, the minority none? … In a really equal democracy, every or any section would be represented, not disproportionately, but proportionately. A majority of the electors would always have a majority of the representatives; but a minority of the electors would always have a minority of the representatives. Man for man, they would be as fully represented as the majority. (Mill 1998, 303)

Mill's concern here is not just with the dominance of the old aristocracy today, but looking forward to the inevitable numerical majority of the working and lower-middle classes with accompanying fears of "working-class intolerance" and the dominant ascent of narrowly class-based and pro-labor parliamentary agendas (Baccarini and Ivanković 2015, 141). If protection of the working-class minority is necessary today, protection of property will be necessary tomorrow, and proportional representation happily institutionalizes the representation and deliberative competition of all views within Parliament.

In sum, Mill's democratic theory jettisons much that is taken for granted in contemporary democratic theory, inviting serious criticism from contemporary democratic theorists (See e.g. Baccarini and Ivanković 2015; Cerovac 2016; Latimer 2018; Lever 2007). But these compromises are designed to embrace an even more fundamental principle of modern representative democracy— universal adult suffrage—at a time when the latter was more controversial

than the former. Mill believed that plural voting, open voting, and proportional representation maximize what is best about representative democracy—universal participation—while minimizing its potential harm to the public. They allow virtually all citizens to participate, while giving more weight to more informed judgments. They give all citizens a vessel to participate, and a responsibility in doing so. With rare exception, every citizen's vote matters, and all are free to vote how they wish. But each is also accountable for their public actions, and the glare of public opinion not only compels citizens to vote responsibly, but encourages them to sharpen their own understanding of what they support and why. This enriches public discourse and makes democracy better.

D. W. Winnicott's Healthy Democracy and the Secret Ballot

A sharp criticism of Mill's open voting scheme centers on the problem of *shame*. As Annabelle Lever (2007, 376) has argued, in a democratic society, "the presumption should be that voters are entitled to keep their votes to themselves. They are entitled to do so … because protection for the privacy of individuals reflects various democratic ideas about the nature and duty of citizens." Moreover, "democracies are concerned not only with the freedom of citizens, but with their social standing, and ability to see and treat each other as equal and responsible adults." Mandatory public voting undercuts these concerns because it "necessarily exposes people to the risk of public humiliation and shame, whether for misinterpreting their own interests, misidentifying their duties, or for weakness of will in voting as they ought" (Lever 2007, 376). At times Mill himself appears to agree, as when he wrote famously in *On Liberty* that while "the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities," in fact "when society itself is the tyrant—society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it … it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself." Therefore, argued Mill, "Protection … against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them" (Mill 1998, 8–9).

Mill thus separated the problem of *social* and *political* tyranny in a way that liberal critics like Laver adamantly reject. Laver (2007, 377) calls Mill "wrong to believe that we can neatly separate the personal and political in a democracy

and, with it, the private and the public." But sensible as such criticism is, it is important to note that this *philosophical* critique of the public vote fails to meet Mill on his own *pathological* terms—in other words, if the vote should be kept secret, then how does doing so address the kinds of pathologies of mass democracy that concerned Mill? One way to defeat this question is to deny the premise that mass democracy is pathological at all. Another is to demonstrate why the secret ballot more effectively addresses these pathologies. The latter approach is adopted by twentieth-century British psychologist D. W. Winnicott.

Donald Winnicott was a Freudian psychologist specializing in child psychology, and in recent years his reputation among political theorists has grown considerably in research tackling topics ranging from neoliberalism and democratic culture to public education and the welfare state (Bowker and Buzby 2017; Honig 2013; Lamothe 2014; Rosenthal 2016). For our purposes, Winnicott is interesting for two reasons: First, given the emotional tenor of our current politics—the so-called the "age of anger" with elections of stealth and shame— a psychologist's perspective may offer unique insight into the crises of our times. This has already been suggested (Coleman 2016). Second, Winnicott's understanding of democracy, like Mill's, combined an appreciation of modern democratic institutions with an acknowledgement of democracy's pathological tendencies. So why does Winnicott, contra Mill, adamantly reject open voting in favor of the secret ballot?

Winnicott's starting point is to reject the assumed premise that citizens express concrete preferences or reasoning when they vote. To further interests or exercise judgment is not *why* people enthusiastically vote. Instead, a growing body of research in political science (see especially Elster 1998a, 1998b) and psychology have highlighted the central role of emotions in political actions. Indicatively, psychologist Drew Westen has highlighted the extent to which citizens with strong ideological predispositions use "motivated reasoning" to absorb, frame, and/or ignore new information based on whether it supports their existing beliefs (Westen et al. 2006), suggesting that "the notion of 'partisan reasoning' is an oxymoron, and most of the time, partisans feel their way to beliefs rather than use their thinking caps" (Packard 2008). In forming political judgments, says Westen, "We ultimately found that reason and knowledge contribute very little … Even when we gave [test subjects] empirical data that pushed them one way or the other, that had no impact, or it only hardened their emotionally biased views" (Packard 2008). In practical terms, "It means recognizing that elections are won or lost in the marketplace of emotions, and that political persuasion is about managing emotions by activating the right networks [of emotions]" (Westen 2008, 420). A similar point was made by *New York Times* writer David Brooks two days before President Obama's 2008 inauguration: "In reality, we voters—all of us—make emotional, intuitive

decisions about who we prefer, and then come up with post-hoc rationalizations to explain the choices that were already made beneath conscious awareness" (Brooks 2008). Let us call this the "intuitive voter."

This "intuitive voter" model sheds light on the meaning of voting for many (if not most) democratic voters, particularly when we acknowledge how unlikely it is that one's vote will determine the outcome (cf. Riker and Ordeshook 1968). In fact, argued Winnicott, the real function of voting is *therapeutic*, an act that both liberates and purges the voting citizen of otherwise suppressed emotions—of fear and hope, love and anger, desire and resentment—and this is for the best. With all this in mind, Winnicott's thesis is twofold. First, he argued that cultivating psychologically healthy citizens— citizens who are happy, socially well-adjusted, and able to contribute meaningfully to democratic processes—requires a social and political environment that encourages citizens to be spontaneous, transparent, and honest without fear of persecution. In other words, it requires the opposite of Mill's public opinion policing. Second, and within this framework, a well-functioning democracy will utilize certain participatory institutions, like the secret ballot, to enable citizens to be their *True Self* in politics, without allowing their most selfish and irrational passions to undermine the public good or the basic foundations of democracy (see LeJeune 2017, pages 250–57 of which the remainder of this article draws significantly).

Winnicott's theory of healthy democracy begins with the humanistic concept of True Self, defined as "the theoretical position from which come the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea. The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action. Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real. Whereas a True Self feels real, the existence of a False Self results in a feeling unreal or a sense of futility" (Winnicott 1960, 148). Conversely, an unhappy sense of False Self emerges when a perceived need for compliance compels one to offer an artificial presentation of oneself. When False Self becomes the dominant form of self-presentation, life becomes unsatisfying and empty.

The True Self experience cannot thrive in an environment of fear and insecurity—indeed, it is precisely the fear that one's genuine personality or opinions will be persecuted that steers one toward a False Self existence. True Self instead requires constant protection and a safe space in which to act—what Winnicott calls a secure *potential space*. The development of *potential space*, argued Winnicott, first happens in the interaction between mother and child, where at birth a mother begins by adapting fully to a baby's needs and wants. Then over time, the psychologically (and socially) healthiest path of development involves a gradual movement from the parent's total adaptation to the infant's needs to "a series of failures of adaptation," which "are again a kind of adaptation

because they are related to the growing need of the child for meeting reality" (Winnicott 1963, 96). The mother's *graduated* failures to adapt do not destroy the *potential space* in which a child feels safe being herself, because they are calibrated to the child's ability to absorb them without trauma, fear, or disillusion. As such, they teach the child to adapt flexibly to the world and prepare the child to join an occasionally uncooperative society.

The "good enough" environment that a mother provides, which accustoms the young person to explore his personality freely, becomes the basis for his healthy social integration in adolescence and adulthood. Subsequently, one can think of psychological health in terms not only of "the absence of psychoneurotic disorder," but also of "freedom within the personality, of capacity for trust and faith … [and] freedom from self-deception," all of which the mother's early adaptive care have facilitated (Winnicott 1967, 26). "The main thing," said Winnicott, "is that the man or woman feels he or she *is living his or her own life*, taking responsibility for action and inaction, and able to take credit for success and blame for failure" (Winnicott 1967, 27; emphasis in original). A person who develops confidently in a reliable *potential space* at home is primed to trust in others and enter society in a healthy way. As Winnicott wrote:

> [T]he parents' attempt to provide a home for their children, in which the children can grow as individuals, and each *gradually add* a capacity to identify with the parents and then wider groupings, starts at the beginning … and in recent years a great deal has been found out by psychologists as to the ways in which a stable home not only enables children to find themselves and to find each other, but also makes them begin to qualify for membership in society in a wider sense. (Winnicott 1950, 248; italics in original)

Elsewhere, Winnicott continued:

> If we assume reasonable achievement in terms of instinct capacity, then we see new tasks for the relatively healthy person. There is, for instance, his or her relationship to society—an extension of the family. Let us say that in health a man or woman is able *to reach towards an identification with society without too great a loss of individual or personal impulse.* There must, of course, be loss in the sense of control of personal impulse, but the extreme of identification with society with total loss of sense of self and self-importance is not normal at all. (Winnicott 1967, 27; italics in original)

There is much to unpack here regarding the healthy individual and a healthy democratic society, and it is useful to consider the opposite of health here, too. On one hand, when a person feels himself acting in a constant state of compliance—when, for reasons internal or external, he finds it easier to adopt a feigned of false persona in front of others—that person falls into the trap of unhappy False Self, whose clinical degrees range considerably. The most neurotic stage, for example, involves total absorption in False Self and total loss of True Self. Here, one effectively lives like an actor who never removes the mask; life is empty and unhappy because of this, but the root problem is not identified. The person may actually confuse their complaint False Self as simple reality. Less neurotic is a False Self which recognizes itself as such and either allows the True Self a "secret life" or "[searches] for conditions which will make it possible for the True Self to come into its own." Finally, a False Self actually exists "In health" when it works alongside the True Self and is "represented by the whole organization of the polite and mannered social attitude." The small degree of False Self in this case represents a healthy compromise, whereby polite social manners that allow one to get along in the social world (integration) combine with an autonomous sense of True Self in limiting cases when compromise "ceases to become allowable when the issues become crucial" (Winnicott 1960, 143, 150; see also LeJeune 2017, 251).

The political arena subsequently marks one of the most important and dangerous areas in which the problem of True/False Self manifests. As one leaves the potential space of the "good enough" home and enters a more judgmental social arena, protecting the integrity of True Self requires that the inclination to trust others with one's genuine personality be transferred to the new 'holding' space of the social, cultural, and political arenas. If one does not feel comfortable in society, for example—if a person does not find that the socio-cultural-political space offers a reliable feeling of security or 'holding' of their genuine personality—the result may be an unhappy and neurotic embrace of a compliant False Self in public. Where this feeling is widespread, the unhappy result is a mass phenomenon of anxiety, unhappiness, and repression hidden beneath False Self personas. The dangers to democracy under these circumstances are myriad, particularly when exogenous shocks explode citizens' genuine feelings into reality. Thus, if in some contexts a relatively benign surprise election is provoked, in others where repression is especially intense and widespread, the explosion of repressed emotions into reality may even be revolutionary, unleashing a cascade of social upheaval and antigovernment protest (Kuran 1989, 1991), or a broad-based scourge of terror, violence, and brutality (see Fanon 2004).

Anxieties surrounding the suppression of True Self in society involve more than just a conflict with society or government—they also involve a moral

tension within one's self, a suppression of the antisocial tendencies that are *always* present at the level of "unconscious fantasy" (Winnicott 1968, 166), what Winnicott elsewhere calls "the fact of conflict in the personal inner psychic reality" (Winnicott 1969, 227). Not only do social pressures repress the individual, but also personal feelings of shame or guilt. The irony is that those who do presumably recognize the worst in themselves—their unhappy and ignoble resentments, for example—can never be happy with themselves, for to act on these impulses evokes personal shame and guilt, but to deny them is to lose one's True Self.

Winnicott, however, believed it absolutely necessary to account for these darker and irrational emotions when considering politics and political institutions, for two reasons. On one hand, doing so helps us understand what people actually do, because:

> In human affairs … [logical or scientific] thinking is but a snare and a delusion unless the unconscious is taken into account. I refer to both meanings of the word, "unconscious" meaning deep and not readily available, and also meaning repressed, or actively kept from availability because of the pain that belongs to its acceptance as part of the self. Unconscious feelings sway bodies of people at critical moments, and who is to say that this is bad or good? It is just a fact, and one that has to be taken into account all the time by rational politicians if nasty shocks are to be avoided. In fact, thinking men and women can only be safely turned loose in the field of planning if they have qualified in this matter of the true understanding of unconscious feelings. (Winnicott 1945, 169)

On the other hand, this clarifies a practical problem for democracy: If one agrees that psychological health involves recognizing and even liberating the spontaneous action of True Self—which includes recognizing and even liberating the kinds of irrational and antisocial elements of True Self that society rejects—then how is democracy to accommodate? To completely dismiss the antisocial urges would encourage a mass phenomenon of unhappy False Selves; but to liberate them risks also liberating all kinds of warlike, aggressive, and antisocial passions that would be the destruction of democracy. But the latter, argued Winnicott, is the challenge modern democracy must honestly address if political participation is to be embraced—the inherent pathologies of mass democracy. Indeed, liberating the antisocial elements of anger and resentment through democratic processes—more specifically, through the secret ballot—is precisely what he encouraged.

"Freedom puts a strain on the individual's whole personality," wrote Winnicott in 1940 at a time of fascist momentum in Europe, for in freedom, one "is left with no logical excuse for the angry or aggressive feelings except the insatiability of his own greed. And he has no one to give or withhold permission to do what he wants to do—in other words, to save him from the tyranny of a strict conscience. No wonder people fear not only freedom, but also the idea of freedom and the giving of freedom" (Winnicott 1940, 215). The assumption of genuine political responsibility is painful to the psyche, particularly when one's True Self motivations are steeped in anger, resentment, or other antisocial tendencies and one must actually bear their moral burden. This burden weighs doubly when our ugly True Selves are exposed to the public, as they might be by an open voting system. But critically, Winnicott argues, we must recognize that antisocial emotions are a mass phenomenon—they are natural—and will always seek an outlet that both satisfies the emotional need of True Self release and minimizes the moral burden of responsibility.

At one extreme there is hero-worship and stubborn attachment to principle. Either of these mechanisms effectively liberates the antisocial emotions of the darker True Self but transfers psychic responsibility for them to another person (the hero) or a preestablished notion of truth (ideology). In either form, responsibility for decisions is evaded by a kind of unthinking commitment or dogmatism. Such programs are tempting—they were the source of twentieth-century European fascism—but the outcome is not satisfying. In the long run, for example, offering mindless allegiance to a demagogic leader or ideology ends up rendering an impoverished sense of True Self, a "poverty of personality" (Winnicott 1940, 216) stemming from a lack of autonomy, and what Winnicott calls an "antisocial tendency" that "is not an identification with authority that arises out of self-discovery," but rather "a sense of frame without sense of picture, a sense of form without retention of spontaneity. This is a prosociety tendency that is anti-individual" (Winnicott 1950, 244; see also LeJeune 2017, 255).

At the other extreme, to avoid political responsibility, one may simply abandon the democratic space altogether. This possibility—nonparticipation to avoid the trauma of shame or guilt for one's political actions—threatens to undermine democracy itself, because effective democracy depends on citizen participation, which in turn requires that citizens take responsibility for their political affairs. Meanwhile citizen nonparticipants over the long run will suffer from a kind of neurotic repression of their natural desire to speak or influence political affairs, particularly given the stakes of modern politics and the multitude of psychic emotions—anger and resentment, hope and greed, love and hate—that political issues rub. So what is to be done? How can responsible political activity be undertaken without threatening man's healthy conscience or destroying democracy itself?

Winnicott's solution is the "secret ballot." In an important description of British parliamentary democracy, he wrote:

> It is obvious that the working of the democratic parliamentary system … depends on the survival of the monarchy, and *pari passu* the survival of the monarchy depends on the people's feeling that they really can, by voting, turn a government out in a parliamentary election or get rid of a prime minister. It is assumed here that the turning out of a government or a prime minister must be on the basis of feeling, as expressed in the secret ballot, and not on the basis of the poll (Gallup or other) that fails to give expression to deep feeling or to unconscious motivation or to trends that seem illogical. (Winnicott 1970, 264)

The secret ballot selection of representatives squares the circle of integrating a healthy release of conscious and subconscious antisocial drives into a stable democratic polity. First, it allows the average citizen to participate in politics in a closed booth that isolates them from public pressure. Thus, there is no danger that social pressures or the tyranny of public opinion will coerce individuals into acting in a manner inconsistent with their True Self. In Winnicott's terms, the voting booth—as opposed to the arena of public opinion—offers a reliable *potential space* within which the individual feels free to act safely, securely, and entirely in accordance with True Self.

Second, when one votes for a person (thus transferring effective responsibility for policymaking to the elected representative), the secret ballot allows the antisocial True Self to act free not only from public shame, but also from a personal sense of guilt. Citizen responsibility for public policy is real, but indirect. Instead, the real burden of guilt is transferred to the *elected officials* themselves who actually determine public policy. Thus, wrote Winnicott, while "The election of a person implies that the electors believe in themselves as persons, and therefore believe in the person they vote for," only "The person elected has the opportunity to act as a person" (Winnicott 1950, 249). The secret ballot has thus empowered the average citizen's True Self (including the antisocial True Self) not only to act unashamedly and without guilt, but to make someone else responsible for it!

This seems quite scary, precisely the stuff of demagogues. But in the long run, this works for democracy for a third crucial reason—because the political candidate who wins the election does *not* himself have the luxury of acting in secret. The representative who crafts public policy must act in full public view, and this renders him accountable to the public not only in terms of representing constituent interests and judgments, but also in the broader realm of public opinion where citizens in public suppress their antisocial tendencies, adopt a

public face of innocence, goodness, and well-being—what we might call "political correctness"—and punish those who do not adhere.

This could mean that elected officials will themselves experience unhappy False Self while on the job and assuming their public persona. It could also mean that, unlike voters, their ability to satisfy their antisocial tendencies is stifled by the real sense of guilt attached to genuine policymaking responsibility. But these are the burdens of office, which one is free to leave at any time; and the transfer of responsibility, guilt, and shame to elected representatives not only preserves the psychological health of democratic citizens, but constrains the antisocial tendencies of the tiny minority who *are* in positions of power.

Conclusion

Whether one approached 2016 from the political left, right, or center, the events of that year—from Brexit, to the US presidential election, to wider concerns about populist national movements throughout Europe—placed modern democracy at a moment of crisis. If recent events revealed anything about modern representative democracy, it is the buried question of the ballot's role in democracy's healthy functioning and the tensions that once inspired a fruitful debate on the ballot's merits. Modern democracy is and has always been a work in progress, and the ballot is no exception.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as already noted, were a green era for modern democracy, and the candid nature in which even basic questions about democracy were broached as real questions led to a flourishing of experimentation, learning, and emulation. The tenor of these debates was not only practical, but even nationalistic and ideological *within* the framework of democracy. By the 1870s, for example, many English, including English liberals, considered open voting a special sign of British character, even a symbol of anti-Catholicism in contrast to the "hypocritical, cunning, furtive, and deceitful" French who first experimented with secret voting in the 1790s (Kinzer 1978b, 243; see also Park 1931). Meanwhile the French, ever perplexed with how to square the circle of both stifling the corruption and intimidation associated with open voting, while also avoiding the secret ballot's impetus to selfishness and a decline in public virtue, for much of the century adopted a novel "secret vote cast in public" scheme, which in early form involved writing one's vote in secret on a table and then personally dropping it in the ballot box, all in full view of the public (Crook and Crook 2007, 453). Only after decades of experimentation did the French finally settle on the "Australian" secret ballot in 1913, with serious discussions beginning several decades earlier to "civilize elections" after a wave of electoral rioting, drinking, and kidnapping, even if more than one commentator at Select Committee hearings called it a "necessary

evil" (Crook and Crook 2007, 463–64). Similar experiments with voting procedures and ballot forms, inspired by diverse institutions throughout Europe and the British colonies, happened throughout the American colonies and the United States during the colonial era and well into the twentieth century (Crook and Crook 2011).

Today, however, democracy faces a unique crisis defined by two intertwined structural conditions. On one hand, modern democracy confronts a world in which society's reach into the private lives of individuals via technology, social media, or otherwise has dramatically expanded, and the penalties for violating society's norms, though always threatening, have become more immediate, unpredictable, and diffuse. On the other hand, democracy as a viable institution now faces an increasingly volatile world of extraordinarily rapid change and global interconnectedness, and this in turn has exacerbated the kinds of anxieties, fears, and resentments—be they racial, tribal, national, or class-based—which democratic publics generally profess to reject. Mill and Winnicott tell us that modern democracy has tools to handle these problems: To wit, where Winnicott would counter the threat of the public gaze with the protection of the secret ballot, Mill would counter voter irrationality and irresponsibility with the sanction of public opinion.

But we cannot readily have both, and the comparison of Mill and Winnicott is most instructive in revealing that our unhappiness with modern democracy, so far as it exists, is not simply the fault of voters or the voting process. It is, rather, a reflection of the inherent pathologies of the mass democracy we embrace, and the product of our collective decision—nay, our apparent consensus—about which alternative we can happily live with.

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