

Chapter 1

Who is a Good Representative?

Most everyone writing on democracy today agrees that democratic institutions must be representative in order for democracy to work. The size of nation states and the complexity of public policy issues rule out direct democracy. Democratic practices require representation. Or as David Plotke (1997) succinctly put it, “representation is democracy.”

Despite this general agreement about the importance of representation for democratic practices, there is relatively little discussion of what it means to represent in a democratic fashion. There is an extensive literature evaluating democratic *institutions*.¹ And there is an extensive literature that discusses the proper behavior of representatives.² But theorists writing on representation have not focused on representing *in a democratic fashion*. As a result, theorists have overlooked the possibility that there are substantive and distinctively democratic standards for distinguishing good representatives from bad ones. The aim of this book is to offer just such standards, standards that democratic citizens ought to employ in evaluating their representatives.

Now, not everyone will agree that we need substantive democratic standards for evaluating representatives. After all, some theorists maintain that a good representative is simply one who advances the policy preferences of her constituents (provided that those policy preferences are lawful). Good representatives are good lackeys (the theoretical literature calls such representatives “delegates”). In fact, most contemporary empirical research on representation assumes that democratic representation occurs when a representative’s actions reflect and respond to constituents’ expressed policy preferences. According to this way of thinking, there is nothing more to representing in a democratic fashion than responsiveness to democratic citizens’ policy preferences.

Others will reject the project of articulating a *single* set of distinctively democratic standards. For instance, Hanna Pitkin (1967) maintains that the concept of representation is paradoxical, and that as a consequence representatives are subject to multiple and conflicting standards of evaluation. Following Pitkin, many contemporary political theorists simply celebrate the diversity of standards that democratic citizens use in evaluating their representatives. That diversity is itself understood as a characteristic of democratic institutions (e.g., Mansbridge, 2002; Sabl, 2002, 2005). For this reason, political theorists often refrain from characterizing any particular choice of representatives as undemocratic. So long as other citizens have the opportunity to oppose that choice and/or citizens are presented with alternative candidates, democratic practices are sufficiently safeguarded. Those who, in this way, equate a commitment to democracy with a commitment to pluralism tend to hold that all criteria for identifying good representatives are contingent, varying with the particular opinions, interests, and perspectives of different democratic citizens. And they defend this position on the grounds that it is minimalist and inclusive. It is minimalist because it does not assume that any particular ethical outlook underlies a theory of good democratic representation. It is inclusive because it is consistent with all citizens' evaluations of their representatives.

However, on my view, democratic standards for evaluating representatives are more constraining. For such standards derive from an ethical outlook that privileges the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Consequently, these standards for evaluating representatives place substantive constraints on what good representatives can and should do. I call political representatives³ within a democratic polity who meet these standards "good democratic representatives."⁴ Such political representatives excel at representing in a democratic fashion. More specifically, good democratic representatives are those political representatives whose advocacy work maintains and advances the legitimacy of democratic institutions.⁵ Such political representatives may be formal political actors, such as presidents,⁶ senators, or other elected officials. But they may also be informal political actors, such as lobbyists or leaders of social movements. What matters is not a political actor's official title or her specific political office, but what she does.⁷

In particular, a representative acts as a good *democratic* representative only if her advocacy work fosters the norms and values distinctive of democratic institutions. These norms and values are crucial to the well-functioning of democratic institutions – that is, to their facilitating peaceful

and just resolutions of political conflicts. Good democratic representatives, then, advance public policies on behalf of democratic citizens in ways that facilitate peaceful and just resolutions of political conflicts. The degree to which democratic institutions, through the agency of good democratic representatives, realize the norms and values distinctive of democratic institutions is the degree to which those institutions are fully democratic.⁸ Three such norms and values are central to the purposes of this project: civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion.⁹

Other political values, such as liberty, toleration, the rule of law, or even piety, might coexist with democratic institutions, but they are not distinctive of democratic institutions. Consider, for example, that a benevolent dictator could support the norms and values of toleration and liberty, such as the freedom of religion, or the rule of law. A monarchy could promote a theocratic rule.

For a norm or value to be distinctive of democratic institutions, it must provide some guidelines for structuring formal political institutions as democratic institutions. It follows that these norms and values, including those of civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion, can only be fully realized in democratic institutions.

Of course, democratic governments do not always support or respect the norms and values of civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion. One only needs to survey the ways in which democratic governments have historically excluded or even enslaved certain groups to realize that democratic governments can violate these norms and values. However, we criticize such governments as *democratic* governments for failing to live up to these norms and values – a point that confirms that these norms and values are distinctive of democratic institutions.

So good democratic representatives are those who respect the norms and values distinctive of democratic political institutions. But this still leaves obscure the answer to the neglected question, “How should democratic citizens evaluate their representatives, as democratic representatives?”

Put simply, democratic citizens should evaluate their representatives by the way in which they advocate – that is, by how they advance public policies on behalf of democratic citizens. Democratic representatives represent democratically only when, in advancing public policies on behalf of their constituents, they aim to foster the legitimacy of democratic institutions, to promote citizens’ participation, and to increase their identification with democratic institutions. Those who represent in a democratic fashion honor these constraints on their advocacy work.

Articulation of these constraints on democratic representation provides guidelines for determining when individual representatives are no longer representing in a democratic fashion. These constraints, then, draw a line that good democratic representatives do not cross. Moreover, corresponding to each of these constraints is a way of excelling at representing in a democratic fashion, a way in which representatives can, in advocating on behalf of their constituents, respect and foster these distinctively democratic norms and values. I will call these forms of political excellence the “virtues of democratic representation” or, simply, “the virtues.” Each virtue provides a general criterion that democratic citizens ought to use in choosing their representatives. Together, these virtues provide a normative framework within which representatives should be evaluated.

That said, evaluations of democratic representatives cannot and should not be formulaic. Judgment plays an ineliminable role in the application of any criteria of good representation to particular democratic representatives. For example, it requires judgment to determine whether a particular president is, in meeting with the Black Congressional Caucus, reaching out to African-Americans and increasing their inclusion in the political process. After all, such a meeting could be just another “photo op.” Moreover, judgment must, in any such application, be sensitive to an array of particular considerations that cannot possibly be codified, or captured in a formula. For this reason, any adequate ethics of democratic representation must permit a variety of opinions about who are good democratic representatives. At the same time, it should provide a general framework through which public debates about who are good democratic representatives can be properly conducted.

It is important to acknowledge the difficulties that the virtues of democratic representation may pose, ones that may complicate the task of distinguishing good democratic representatives from bad ones. Indeed, the difficulties posed by the virtues may be fundamental. As we shall see, the three virtues of democratic representation that I distinguish can be in tension with one another. Some democratic representatives, despite their best efforts and intentions, will face situations in which they can fulfill the demands of one virtue only at the cost of failing to fulfill those of another. Furthermore, there are circumstances under which pursuit of a virtue of democratic representation may pose a cost – which can potentially be prohibitive – to a polity. If democratic institutions are to resolve conflicts fairly and peacefully, a balanced approach to the virtues of democratic representation, one that attends to the problems they pose, as well as to the benefits they provide, is crucial.

Indeed, I hold that the purpose of democratic institutions simply is to resolve conflicts within a pluralist society fairly and peacefully. And the legitimacy of democratic institutions relies both on adjudicating these conflicts properly and on democratic citizens recognizing the fairness of these resolutions. So, to the extent that good democratic representation is crucial for the proper operation of democratic institutions, it is also crucial to the legitimacy of those institutions. The virtues serve as constraints on representatives that help to insure the fairness and legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Further, the stability and sometimes the survival of democratic institutions depend on citizens seeing that the institutions are adjudicating conflicts fairly. For if a disgruntled minority or majority holds that democratic institutions are unfair, then such groups are likely to employ undemocratic practices – for example, violence – to settle their political conflicts. Unfair and illegitimate democratic institutions are more likely to devolve into totalitarian and authoritarian forms of government.¹⁰ And democratic citizens can, in turn, become accustomed to democratic institutions functioning as tools of domination.

A democratic society can only survive, let alone function properly, if it shows a kind of moderation toward the virtues of democratic representation. Here, too, it will be important to see that democratic representatives cannot always exhibit all of these virtues, but must sometimes choose among them. An examination of the various trade-offs among these virtues that good democratic representatives must make will help us to discern the requisite moderation. It will also suggest that good democratic representation might not always be possible.

The extent to which good democratic representatives can successfully negotiate the problems with democratic representation will depend, in part, on the capabilities of citizens and of their representatives. Sometimes a particular society might not be ready for democratic representation. Here, I follow John Stuart Mill (1991 [1861], 13), who recognizes that the appropriate form of government for any given society depends on the capacities of citizens. When citizens lack the proper capacities, democratic institutions cannot always function properly. Under such circumstances, democratic institutions can be used to dominate and oppress democratic citizens, and good democratic representation may even be undesirable. Good democratic representation is therefore a contingent political good. It is only desirable under certain conditions. Part of the job of good democratic representatives is to help make it possible for democratic institutions to function properly, by promoting conditions in which democratic citizens

can come to appreciate the importance of having democratic representative institutions for settling disagreements among citizens fairly and peacefully.

The Good Representative proceeds on the working assumption that the norms and values that guide the design of institutional structures for democratic polities can also provide some guidance for the selection of the representatives who occupy positions within those institutions. Indeed, my argument draws on existing theoretical discussions of how formal institutions are to be designed in light of democratic norms and values to show how these norms and values should also inform citizens' choice of democratic representatives. And, in doing so, I further the insights of those who have recognized the importance of informal political actors in representative democracies.¹¹ In fact, one purpose of this book is to expand the scope of the theoretical literature on democratic representation beyond formal governmental institutions. Democratic representation is an activity of formal as well as informal representatives.

By identifying a function common to both formal and informal representatives – that is, the function of advocating public policies in ways consonant with democratic norms and values – I provide a common currency for evaluating all democratic representatives, one independent of their particular offices. Instead of focusing on the fairness of procedures for authorizing and holding representatives accountable, this book addresses an important, albeit often overlooked, question: What criteria should democratic citizens use in selecting democratic representatives? How democratic citizens answer that question will affect not only who is selected to serve as a representative, but also the performance of democratic institutions.

An Ethics of Democratic Representation

There are two basic questions that an ethics of democratic representation must address: What are the proper criteria for assessing democratic representatives and identifying the good ones? Are there any drawbacks to having good democratic representation? We will see that answering these two questions adequately turns on clarifying what it means to represent in a democratic fashion. And in clarifying that – in other words, the proper function, or characteristic activity, of democratic representatives – we also clarify what it means to be a good democratic representative – that is, one who excels at representing in a democratic fashion.

In focusing on the function, or characteristic activity, of democratic representatives, and deriving my account of a good representative from this function, I follow Aristotle. And I am assuming that there is a conceptual connection between the function, or characteristic activity, of a thing and its excellence as the thing that it is. Chapter 3 develops and defends this view. For now, it will suffice to see, quite generally, how virtues of a thing are read off of its function. For example, the function of a knife is to cut. A good knife is a knife that cuts well. The virtue, or excellence, of a knife, then, is sharpness. And, more generally, what it is for a thing to have the virtue or excellence proper to its kind is nothing other than its being disposed, in exercising its characteristic activity, to engage in that activity well. I am proposing that, in parallel fashion, the virtues of democratic representatives are to be read off of the function, or characteristic activity, of democratic representatives. (Compare, here, Aristotle's argument concerning the moral virtues at *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I Chapter 7, 1097b25–28: see Aristotle, 1970 [1831].)

The function of democratic representatives is to advocate on behalf of their constituents in ways that allow for the fair and peaceful resolution of political disagreements within a pluralist society. In other words, the characteristic activity of democratic representatives is *democratic advocacy*. The degree to which a democratic representative engages in this characteristic activity well is the degree to which that representative excels at representing in a democratic fashion. As we will see, to engage in democratic advocacy well, a democratic representative must realize three virtues: the virtue of *fair-mindedness*, through which a representative contributes to the realization of the value of *civic equality*; the virtue of *critical trust building*, through which a representative contributes to the realization of the value of *self-governance*; and, finally, the virtue of *good gatekeeping*, through which a representative contributes to the realization of the value of *inclusion*.

It is worth reemphasizing that my understanding of democratic representation applies to *all* political actors who advance public policies in democratic institutions. Informal as well as formal representatives perform the function of democratic representation.¹² My account of democratic representation, and the virtues of democratic representation, articulates a general ethical outlook that should underlie and inform the activity of all those who act as political advocates within a democratic polity.

In fact, a benefit of attending to democratic advocacy, as I conceive it, is that doing so provides standards for assessing informal, as well as formal,

representatives. Attending to the controversies surrounding advocacy, especially the advocacy of informal representatives, in light of my account of democratic advocacy, reveals how democratic norms and values are to be brought directly to bear in assessing democratic representatives. In the case of many informal representatives, there is no temptation to try to settle such controversies simply by appealing to formal procedures that authorize the representative: after all, not all informal representatives are authorized by formal procedures. Consequently, one cannot appeal to authorization procedures to settle the matter of who is a legitimate, and therefore preferable, representative. Moreover, an examination of controversial instances of political advocacy – specifically, instances of informal representation – will put us in a better position to identify how and where representatives, even when they are properly formally elected and abide by the law, can nonetheless violate democratic norms and values.

To understand why democratic advocacy is the characteristic activity of democratic representatives, it is useful to consider one of the most persuasive arguments for the legitimacy of democratic authority. The argument, made forcefully by Thomas Christiano (1996), is that democratic institutions are necessary under certain conditions of diversity. In particular, democratic institutions are necessary to provide fair procedures for adjudicating disputes about public policy when citizens' interests, values, and perspectives conflict. It is, I would argue, in virtue of realizing the norms and values of civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion that democratic institutions provide these procedures, and adjudicate conflicts and disagreements in ways that legitimate democratic authority. The function of a democratic representative, then, is to advocate public policies for her constituents in a way that contributes to the fair adjudication of such disputes within her society. A good democratic representative is one who performs this function well. And, I will argue, a democratic representative performs this function well only if her advocacy work is consonant with the norms and values that underlie the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Of course, not all democratic representatives do in fact engage in democratic advocacy. Anyone who is elected is thereby a democratic representative. And someone who is democratically elected could fail to engage in the characteristic activity of democratic representatives. For instance, a democratically elected representative fails to advocate in a democratic fashion when he refuses to deliberate with other citizens on the grounds that he is obeying God's direct command to him and therefore would be corrupted by attending to the opinions and perspectives of others. Moreover, some

representatives might be so corrupt or depraved that they do not care at all about conforming to fair procedures, or about the impact of the policies that they pursue on democratic institutions. They solicit citizens' opinions, not to pander, but to frame issues so that they can lower the potential electoral costs of their policy goals. They disguise the costs that their policies impose on democratic citizens and democratic institutions (cf., Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000). Such representatives might advocate, but they do not – and cannot – advocate in a democratic fashion. But, despite their failure, or even their inability, to advocate in a democratic fashion, and thus to engage in the activity characteristic of a democratic representative, these representatives nonetheless count as democratic representatives simply in virtue of being duly elected. Compare: a knife that is so dull that it cannot cut can still be a knife.

It should now be evident that any adequate ethics of democratic representation must address the ways in which representatives should advance public policies under conditions of pluralism. Given such conditions, democratic representatives will almost inevitably advance public policies that some citizens will endorse and others condemn.¹³ A good democratic representative is not likely to be approved by, or even appreciated by, every one of her constituents, let alone by all citizens. Thus, my claim is not that a good democratic representative will be valued by every citizen (or even a majority of citizens); rather, my claim is that a good democratic representative will not be the unbridled advocate of her own constituents. In other words, a good democratic representative will constrain her advocacy in light of her appreciation of the conditions of pluralism, and of the demands that the norms and values of civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion place on all democratic representatives.

The Proper Scope of an Ethics of Democratic Representation

The Good Representative provides some guidance for the proper assessment of representatives: democratic representatives should, first and foremost, be assessed by the impact that their actions have on the legitimacy of democratic institutions. If a democratic institution loses legitimacy because the personal misconduct of representatives has contributed to the loss of trust in that institution, then those representatives are properly subject to severe criticism. And if the legitimacy of a democratic institution is compromised

because it does not include representatives from marginalized groups, then its representatives are inadequate. In articulating the three virtues of democratic representation, my ethics of democratic representation offers citizens standards they can use in choosing among representatives, and a common set of norms that all good democratic representatives should follow. These virtues, moreover, can help settle contemporary controversies about representation by helping to resolve some of the conflicts about competing standards of good representation that underlie these controversies. These virtues help to resolve these conflicts by clarifying how the norms and values distinctive of democratic institutions are to be brought to bear in assessing the advocacy work of political representatives.

The Good Representative offers guidance for the assessment of democratic representatives by providing a normative framework for determining the extent to which an individual representative excels at representing in a democratic fashion. To be a good democratic representative is to have and exercise all three of the virtues of democratic representation – the virtue of fair-mindedness, the virtue of critical trust building, and the virtue of good gatekeeping – and to avoid the dangers associated with each of them. Consequently, representatives who advance public policies that undermine civic equality, limit the ability of citizens to govern themselves, or exclude certain groups from participation might be excellent delegates of democratic citizens who hold such preferences. However, such representatives are not good democratic representatives. For better or worse, democratic norms and values place certain constraints on the behavior that democratic representatives can engage in and still be considered good democratic representatives.

The virtues of democratic representation also require democratic representatives to advocate out of a correct understanding of their proper function. Now this function, as we saw, consists in contributing to the proper functioning of democratic institutions – providing a fair and peaceful resolution to political conflicts. Moreover, democratic institutions can provide such resolutions only by way of drawing on, and reinforcing, citizens' shared commitment to certain distinctively democratic norms and values, which justify preferring democratic institutions to nondemocratic ones. The good democratic representative is thus one whose advocacy work contributes, in and through the proper function of democratic institutions, to the realization of these norms and values in her polity.

Democratic citizens ought to prefer representatives who exhibit these three virtues over those who do not. And citizens ought to assess criticisms

of, and controversies surrounding, representatives in light of the understanding of good democratic representation that a detailed articulation of these three virtues provides. Each of these virtues provides a different focal point for evaluating representatives. Those who are committed to democratic norms and values should look for representatives who not only exhibit these virtues, but who properly negotiate the problems associated with these virtues. In this way, the three virtues become normative tools of evaluation, assisting the critical assessments of democratic citizens.

My approach bears some important similarities to that of contemporary virtue theory.¹⁴ After all, notions of function and excellence are central to virtue theory. Nonetheless, my theoretical aims and those of virtue theorists are fundamentally different. Virtue theorists aim to provide a moral theory within which morally right action is understood in terms of character: what makes an action a right action is that it is one that a morally virtuous agent would perform. My concern, however, is not with this general and fundamental debate among moral theorists concerning the relative priority of character and action.

My main concern is rather with *political* character – that is, the stable habits, dispositions, and attitudes of representatives that guide their actions as representatives. As recent empirical findings indicate, my focus on political character reflects an approach that US citizens actually commonly take in assessing their representatives: US citizens often select their representatives on the basis of what they perceive to be the representatives' moral character.¹⁵ In concentrating on the virtues of democratic representatives, then, my ethics of democratic representation speaks to democratic citizens in terms they already use in selecting their representatives. Indeed, if we are to aid democratic citizens in their assessments of representatives, we cannot simply avoid talk of character.

One reason for framing an ethics of democratic representation in terms of the virtues is because I am inclined to think that representatives do have political character, and that it is in fact important for the proper operation of democratic institutions that a polity have representatives with democratically excellent political character. Another is that talking in this way is natural, given the way in which I derive standards of good democratic representation, in Aristotelian fashion, from an analysis of the proper, or characteristic, activities of democratic representatives. But the most important reason for talking in terms of political character is the fact it is no accident that democratic citizens assess their representatives in terms of their political character. Given the complexity of the actual policy debates

that representatives in modern societies have to navigate, a complexity that makes it impractical for most citizens to follow these debates closely, a natural way of assessing representatives is by their political character. If a representative exhibits excellent political character in a given context in a fashion that a citizen can appreciate, it is not unreasonable for that citizen to support that representative, on the grounds that the representative will exhibit that excellent character in other contexts.

But the virtues of democratic representation are intended to articulate an ideal not only of character, but also of behavior, one that democratic representatives should strive to approximate. The virtues are also intended to provide citizens with critical tools necessary for assessing not only their representatives' political character, but also their actions, all according to democratic standards. The virtues also provide a general framework within which public deliberation that specifies what actions good democratic representation requires in a given situation can be fruitfully conducted.

Although I am inclined to believe that representatives who perform the actions that the virtues require of them will also possess these virtues of democratic representation – that is, a certain political character – one can imagine a representative who fakes possessing the virtues. Indeed, if we can watch and regulate someone enough, she might engage, much of the time, in the desired behavior, even if she lacks the character that would internally dispose her to that behavior. Call “truly excellent democratic representatives” those who themselves have the right character, one that would dispose them to act as the virtues require, independently of any extrinsic motivation. But a representative could, in principle, not in fact be truly excellent and still satisfy the criteria I have proposed for evaluating good democratic representatives. For my purposes, I want to set aside the question, “Which comes first, the behavior or the character?” I want instead to focus on describing democratic advocacy that exhibits the behavior that is usually indicative of a democratic representative's possessing the virtues of democratic representation.

Consequently, *The Good Representative* should be of interest even to those who do not want ultimately to do political theory using the language of political character.¹⁶ For talking in terms of the virtues provides democratic citizens with the tools that facilitate their demanding representatives to do a good job of representing in a democratic fashion. If my ethics of democratic representation meets this goal, it will enable the selection of representatives who preserve and foster the legitimacy of

democratic institutions. By assisting democratic citizens in their choice of representatives, an ethics of democratic representation puts representative democracies in a better position to realize good representation, and to avoid bad representation.

That said, I do not expect an ethics of democratic representation to eliminate all controversies about the proper behavior of good democratic representatives. Even if democratic citizens reach a consensus about an ethics of democratic representation, the messy work of applying the criteria articulated in that ethics to particular circumstances still needs to be done. Moreover, democratic citizens will need, through public deliberation and debate, to arrive at more determinate understandings of the norms and values that justify adopting democratic institutions.

The importance of articulating an ethics of democratic representation is underscored by the fact, evident in the course of the spread of democratic forms of government, that representative democratic institutions can be favored for unsavory reasons. Some may favor representative institutions because such institutions allow one group of citizens (e.g., a religious or ethnic majority) to dominate another group (e.g., a religious or ethnic minority). Others may favor democratic representative institutions as a way of insuring the charismatic rule of a particular individual; for example, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. Given the variety of reasons that citizens can have for supporting representative institutions, political theorists should not assume that remaining silent about the criteria that democratic citizens should use to choose their representatives will necessarily promote pluralism or political freedom. It also means that political theorists should not endorse every norm or value that democratic citizens invoke to justify favoring democratic representative institutions. In order to choose their representatives more wisely, democratic citizens need to articulate and defend their conceptions of democratic norms and values, as well as how their understanding of good democratic representation is connected to the realization of those norms and values in their polity.

The articulation of general criteria for good democratic representatives – the virtues of democratic representation – will serve two purposes. It will help democratic citizens choose representatives who excel at representing in a democratic fashion. It will also help democratic representatives make better judgments about how to go about advancing public policies, judgments that are informed by democratic norms and values. Knowledge of the dangers associated with democratic representation will allow representatives to make better decisions.

Controversies about good representation are likely to intensify as a result of my articulating an ethics of democratic representation. I fully expect *The Good Representative* to be controversial. Some will disagree with my choice of the virtues of democratic representation, while others will disagree with how I understand and characterize a particular virtue. I welcome and invite such disagreements, for it would be healthy for disagreements to replace the existing silence about democratic standards for evaluating individual representatives. An articulated ethics of democratic representation is, in my opinion, vital to the health of any democratic polity, because democratic citizens can and do choose bad representatives – that is, representatives who actively undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions. To remain silent about the proper criteria for choosing representatives is to ignore the fact that democratic citizens will not always bring proper standards to bear in evaluating their representatives. Contemporary political theory should not be afraid to challenge the judgments of democratic citizens by offering guidelines for assessing individual representatives. By educating democratic citizens about the importance of democratic institutions, the distinctive values of democracy, and the proper way to represent in a democratic fashion, an ethics of democratic representation can change and, hopefully, improve the criteria by which democratic citizens select their representatives. If democratic citizens are to evaluate their representatives by whether they preserve or undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions, existing criteria such as “having a good moral character” or “being willing to bring home the bacon” need to be refined. The purpose of this book is not to eliminate disagreements about good democratic representation; rather, it is to provide a framework within which these debates are to be properly, and fruitfully, conducted.

Three Assumptions

There are three assumptions that underlie the argument of this book. The first is that democratic norms and values should inform the institutional design of a pluralist society. I take as a starting point that representative democracies need to provide fair procedures for giving voice to concerns of citizens and for authorizing binding decisions. This book, therefore, is not an argument for the moral superiority of democracy (for such an argument, see Barry, 1990 [1965]). Nor does it offer a justification for democratic political institutions.

I will, to be sure, be questioning those who claim that theoretical discussions of democratic representation ought to focus *exclusively* on formal political institutions. But in doing so, I do not mean to deny a crucial operating assumption of that approach – namely, that fair elections are necessary features of democratic polities. I deny only that there is no more to a democratic polity's living up to democratic norms than its routinely providing fair elections. Indeed, we will see that the same democratic norms that should inform the institutional design of a pluralist society ought also to inform assessments of individual democratic representatives – and, indeed, the relations between citizens and their democratic representatives. That representatives advocate in conformity to these norms is, I argue, a crucial source of legitimacy both for democratic representatives and for democratic institutions. But for the record, this book rests on an assumption that democratic political institutions, although flawed, are the best source of political authority for pluralist societies. In fact, I derive my virtues of democratic representation from an already existing ethical outlook that endorses democratic values – specifically, civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion – that ground the preferability and legitimacy of democratic institutions. In deriving the virtues of democratic representation from this ethical outlook, I stand in agreement with Hanna Pitkin (1967) in an important respect. I take one's standards for evaluating representatives to depend on one's political world view. I should stress that, despite the fact that representatives who possess the virtues enhance both their legitimacy and the legitimacy of democratic institutions, the virtues are not meant to identify who is a democratic representative in respect of having authority to speak and act on behalf of citizens. Rather, isolating the distinctive kinds of political excellence that democratic representatives should realize as *democratic* representatives brings into clear relief both what makes for *good* representatives and what makes for *bad* representatives. Even representatives who enjoy authority may nonetheless be bad, if their activities threaten the health of our democracies and hinder our realizing the very values that make us care about having democratic institutions.

This leads to the second assumption of this book – namely, that, democratic norms and values should “condition” citizens' assessments of their representatives and the expectations they have of their representatives. Of course, not every aspect of life has to be governed by democratic norms and values. For instance, democratic citizens may consistently champion the democratic value of equality while accepting and even embracing certain inequalities in their personal relationships. Democratic theorists should

resist the impulse to insist that democratic norms and values inform all aspects of citizens' lives. Here I concur with Ian Shapiro (1994) that democracy is a "subordinate foundational good." For Shapiro,

although democracy is essential to ordering social relations justly, we should resist every suggestion that it is the only good for human beings, that it is the highest human good, or that it should dominate the activities we engage in. Democracy operates best when it conditions our lives without determining their course. (126)

Shapiro's discussion points to the fact that democratic citizens can, and perhaps should, hold some other values to be more important than democratic values. Consider the choice democratic citizens may face between a representative who realizes the three virtues and yet supports war and one who fails to realize the three virtues and yet is willing to do what it takes to avoid war. Citizens can justifiably prefer the latter representative, but my ethics of democratic representation spells out the potential costs for doing so. Democratic citizens who put other values first may directly or indirectly weaken the ability of democratic institutions to adjudicate political conflicts fairly and peacefully. They thereby put democratic institutions at risk of becoming tools for domination. Ultimately, democratic citizens need to decide how much good democratic representation they need.

Nevertheless, weighty reasons dictate that, given the conditions of pluralism, democratic norms and values guide the behavior of those who advance public policies on behalf of democratic citizens. Individuals may, under certain circumstances, reasonably regard a representative's ability to "bring home as much bacon as possible" to be more important than that representative's ability to excel at being a good democratic representative. However, being an effective advocate is not the same as being a good *democratic* representative. And if democratic institutions are to operate properly, democratic citizens cannot simply ignore instances in which their representatives – both formal and informal – violate democratic norms and values. They must pay some attention to whether their representatives are good democratic representatives. Substantive democratic norms should inform, and sometimes be the overriding factors in, their evaluations of the political actors who advocate in their name. In other words, citizens ought to reflect on and assess the degree to which the advocacy work of their representatives fosters democratic norms and values. The degree to which citizens simply prefer representatives who "take care of their own," whatever the cost to vital democratic norms and values, is the degree to

which good democratic representation is at risk of being undermined. Thus, the democratic virtues are standards that democratic representatives should strive to achieve and standards to which democratic citizens ought to hold their representatives accountable.

The third and final assumption of this book is that democratic citizens will disagree not just about public policies, but also about the proper standards for identifying democratic representatives. Both sorts of disagreements are reflected, for instance, in public debates about the relative desirability of having George W. Bush or Bill Clinton as their president. Democratic citizens will possess multiple and sometimes opposing standards for identifying good representatives. Some want young and personable representatives, while others prefer mature and authoritative ones. Some citizens may prefer representatives who hold certain policy views; for example, those who denounce abortion or apply the affirmative action litmus test to judicial nominees. Such disagreement among citizens does not undermine my project. Rather, it helps to motivate it. Just as the fact of pluralism partially justifies the adoption of democratic institutions, so too the fact that citizens disagree about what makes for a good representative justifies appealing to democratic norms and values to help negotiate such disagreements.

This appeal to distinctively democratic norms and values yields standards of good democratic representation that should be used not just by democratic citizens in their selection and support of representatives, but also by those representatives themselves. Through these standards, democratic norms and values can and should inform representatives' thinking about their advocacy work. For instance, the democratic norms of transparency and accountability, rather than simply considerations of political advantage, should inform democratic representatives' conduct toward their critics. The democratic value of civic equality should inform representatives' attempts to balance the demands of their supporters with opposing demands made by their competitors. And the democratic value of autonomy should instruct democratic representatives to avoid monopolizing power, to keep democratic institutions from becoming tools of domination.

The Theoretical Contribution of *The Good Representative*

Democratic theorists like to argue about what are good democratic institutions, not about who are good democratic representatives. However, on

my account, democratic representation is *not* a characteristic of formal representative institutions. In other words, we should not identify democratic representation simply by how political actors are authorized and held accountable through formal elections. Democratic representation needs to be understood, rather, as an activity on the part of representatives – political advocacy that has as its function enabling democratic institutions to settle political conflicts fairly and peacefully. Such an understanding of democratic representation contributes to two specific areas in democratic theory: treatments of deliberative democracy and debates about descriptive representation. Let me sketch these contributions by spelling out how this book situates itself in some of the more important recent work in both areas.

Deliberative democracy

In taking public deliberation to be vital to democracy, my project works with a conception of democracy that falls in the deliberative, or educative, as opposed to the aggregative, or economic, camp. The latter conception of democracy, most famously articulated by Joseph Schumpeter (1976) and Anthony Downs (1957), emphasizes the importance of competition. This conception remains neutral toward not only the substance of the public policies that representatives advance, but also to the manner in which they advance public policies. On this conception, representatives are democratic simply to the extent that they advance the policy preferences of their constituents. Competition among different representatives suffices to provide institutional incentives adequate to secure responsive and accountable representation. Aggregative theorists emphasize the importance of self-interest as motivating responsive and desirable political behavior. And they exhibit a minimalist approach to democratic theory that is well expressed by Ian Shapiro's notion of democracy as "limiting domination." For Shapiro, "Schumpeterian competition in public institutions is desirable not for its own sake but rather as the best available mechanism . . . to limiting domination" (2003, 75). While I agree that self-interest can be a democratically valuable motivation, and that democracy should work against domination, an aggregative or economic conception of democracy provides little guidance for debates over the preferability of different representatives. It ignores the role that citizens' evaluation and choice of representatives plays in maintaining public accountability (e.g., choosing representatives who provide accurate and available information to the public) and limiting

domination (e.g., spurning representatives who eliminate democratic checks and balances for the sake of their political efficacy).

Consequently, relatively few contemporary democratic theorists concern themselves with the manner in which political representatives advance public policies on behalf of democratic citizens.¹⁷ It is the *competition* among political representatives in setting the agenda and in implementing certain public policy preferences that is crucial to democratic representation. So long as the competitiveness of the political arena is preserved, informal democratic practices are sufficiently safeguarded. Most theorists hold that democratic citizens should be free to advance their public policies in ways commensurate with the intensity of their policy preferences, and so they have little to say about how political parties, interest groups, social movements, or political associations should advocate public policies. The more zealous the advocacy, the better. Instead of focusing on the advocacy of informal and formal political actors, most theorists follow James Madison (see Madison et al., 1987 [1788]) in assuming that institutional arrangements are sufficient constraints on representatives. Once institutional constraints are in place – foremost among them, institutional arrangements that secure fair elections or promote democratic deliberations – democratic citizens can use whatever criteria they prefer to select their representatives. The institutions will serve to balance out any unsavory motivations of political representatives.

Such a minimalist approach to democratic theory is clearly inadequate. The health of a democratic polity depends on its citizens discerning and demanding good democratic representation. And good democratic representation, in turn, requires individual representatives to attend, in their advocacy work, to the norms and values distinctive of democratic institutions. The economic theory of democracy needs to be supplemented with an ethics of democratic representation, an ethics that enables, and encourages, democratic citizens to choose representatives who advocate public policies in a democratic fashion – that is, representatives whose advocacy work is informed by fundamental democratic norms and values.

To argue that a framework is needed to identify good democratic representatives is not to deny that institutions play an important role in constraining the actions of individual representatives. I agree with Madison that institutions can provide incentives that constrain the unsavory motivations of politicians. Competition among representatives is certainly one way to provide democratic citizens with choices. However, it is important to recognize the role that democratic citizens have in selecting representatives

and thereby in choosing representatives who are charged with protecting the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Truth be told, representatives have the power, collectively, if not individually, to undermine democratic institutions. Nancy Bermeo (2003) has recently shown that political elites can play a crucial role in preserving democratic institutions. Democratic citizens need to choose their representatives wisely – that is, in ways that support the reasons for preferring democratic to nondemocratic institutions.

In arguing that good democratic representation requires that the advocacy work of representatives be informed by fundamental democratic norms and values, I am thus arguing that the deliberative, or educative, conception of democracy is more adequate than the aggregative, or economic, conception. But I am also developing further the more substantive conception of good democratic representation championed by deliberative democrats. Most deliberative democrats recognize that modern democracies cannot do without elected representatives. For example, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson report that most deliberative democrats “favor some form of representative democracy. On these versions of the theory, citizens rely on their representatives to do their deliberating for them” (2004, 30). According to Gutmann and Thompson, the advantage of having representatives is “that deliberation by leaders who have been tested by experience (if only by political campaigns) is likely to be more informed, effective, and relevant (if not more sophisticated)” (*ibid.*). Implicit in this view is that the quality of democratic deliberations depends on the quality of the representatives. But deliberative democrats have not, I believe, said enough about what makes for a good democratic representative. In particular, deliberative democrats need an account of good democratic representation that gives more weight to the norms and values distinctive of democratic institutions, for example, civic equality, self-governance, and inclusion: good democratic representatives advance public policies in ways that attend to such values. Deliberative democrats also need to provide a detailed account of how democratic citizens should take such values into account in their choice of representatives. An understanding of democratic representation as democratic advocacy provides just such an account.

It also expands the scope of discussion of good representation to encompass more than the deliberative activity of representatives. In putting the question, “How should good democratic representatives advocate?” front and center, I encourage political theorists to attend to the entire range of activities proper to democratic representatives. This shift is important for two reasons. First, it acknowledges the relatively minor role that

deliberation actually plays in the public policy-making processes in most modern democracies, including the United States. As Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (2004) and Bruce Ackerman and John Fishkin (2002) point out, there is very little deliberation in contemporary politics, dominated as it is by superficial television commercials and public relations campaigns. Consequently, any adequate account of democratic representation must attend not just to deliberation, but to other ways in which political representatives advance public policies – for example, through lobbying, fundraising, and mobilizing citizens (for a discussion of non-deliberative political activities, see Walzer, 1999). Second, the quality and efficacy of the public deliberation engaged in by democratic representatives needs to be assessed in the context of all of their advocacy work. The public deliberation of good democratic representation encourages the active, informed, and critical participation of the electorate both in that public deliberation and, more generally, in the entire political process. Indeed, good democratic representation should, by increasing such participation on the part of the electorate, expand and enhance the role that public deliberation plays in the life of a democratic polity. By shifting the discussion to advocacy, citizens gain additional grounds for assessing the performance of their representatives.

Descriptive representation for historically disadvantaged groups

Historically disadvantaged groups know the importance of good representation, for such groups have often been betrayed by their representatives. Moreover, democraticization has not always meant progress for some groups, for example, women (di Stefano, 1997, 206). An understanding of democratic representation from groups that have been denied the right to vote as well as groups that have won and then lost the right to run for office changes how one sees democratic representation. In fact, a growing literature has revised the meaning of democratic representation in light of the experiences of historically disadvantaged groups. Theorists such as Iris Marion Young (2000) and Melissa Williams (1998) have proposed alternative understandings of representation that can account for why historically disadvantaged groups need representatives from those groups. Young's understanding of representation as "a differentiated relationship" and Williams's understanding of "representation as mediation" allow us to see problems with the existing ways in which citizens are being represented in democratic polities. Such understandings of democratic representation

support institutional reforms aimed at increasing the presence of historically disadvantaged groups, for example, reserved seats, party list quotas, and group vetoes.

But in concentrating on the institutional reforms adopted to increase the number of descriptive representatives, this literature has failed to articulate standards for assessing the performance of individual representatives. Such an omission is startling because both Williams and Young recognize that members of historically disadvantaged groups do not always represent other members of those groups. For example, Young explicitly recognizes how improving the representation of Latinos can work against improving the representation of gay and lesbian Latinos. Young is acutely aware that descriptive representatives can marginalize further certain members of historically disadvantaged groups' interests. Similarly, Melissa Williams (1998, 6) states that "it would be absurd to claim that a representative, simply because she is a woman, therefore represents the interests or perspectives of women generally, or that an African-American representative is automatically representative of all African-Americans. The mere presence of members of marginalized groups in legislatures is not *sufficient* for the fair representation of citizens from those groups, even though it is often *necessary*." Without specifying who counts as a preferable descriptive representative, institutional reforms aimed at increasing the number of descriptive representatives can cause further damage – increasing the vulnerability of some who have already been marginalized by democratic institutions.

Consequently, we need a better account of the relationship between democratic representation and descriptive representation. Understanding the distinctive role of descriptive representatives for historically disadvantaged groups within a democratic polity, by situating the account of such representatives within a more general account of democratic representatives, is the first step. Standards for assessing the performance of individual descriptive representatives for historically disadvantaged groups are best understood within an account of the standards that should inform the assessment of all democratic representatives. Moreover, none of the recent works on democratic representation have adequately acknowledged the importance of democratic advocacy to good democratic representation. As a result, these works are not in a position to assess adequately the extent to which an individual representative – whether a descriptive representative of a historically disadvantaged group or a descriptive representative of a privileged group – excels at representing in a democratic

fashion. The provision of criteria for assessing descriptive representatives of historically disadvantaged groups specifically, as well as criteria for assessing democratic representatives more generally, is an important way of increasing accountability to historically disadvantaged groups.

The Structure of *The Good Representative*

The book begins by discussing one way in which good democratic representatives are typically identified – that is, by their membership in historically disadvantaged groups. Most theorists do recognize that members of certain groups must be present in democratic institutions in order for good democratic representation to take place. In other words, descriptive representation is considered necessary, albeit not sufficient, for good democratic representation. By descriptive representation, I mean the representation of historically disadvantaged groups by members from those groups. In Chapter 2, I examine the arguments theorists have offered for descriptive representation and show how, properly understood, these arguments show why *all* democratic citizens should worry about who acts and advocates in their name. The arguments for descriptive representation all turn on the contention that a commitment to distinctively democratic norms and values requires that historically disadvantaged groups be represented by members of those groups. Properly understood, these arguments generate constraints, not only on what democratic representatives should look like, but also on how descriptive representatives ought to advocate public policies on behalf of their constituents. Moreover, these arguments generate constraints on advocacy that apply not only to descriptive representatives, but to democratic representatives more generally: the good representative is one whose advocacy fosters fundamental democratic norms and values within the polity.

Chapter 3 articulates and defends my understanding of democratic advocacy. I begin by arguing that the scope of democratic representation should be expanded to include all political actors – be they formal or informal representatives – who engage in democratic advocacy. Democratic standards need to apply to those representatives who play important functions in democratic polities, functions vital to the proper operation of democratic institutions. I defend this proposal by identifying several sources of authority for democratic representatives, as well as mechanisms of accountability other than that of formal elections, and

argue that these sources and mechanisms apply to informal representatives. I then situate my understanding of democratic representation within the existing literature on good representation, revealing that the existing theoretical literature cannot provide an adequate account of what it means to excel at representing in a democratic fashion. In other words, the existing literature does not identify the standards that govern democratic representatives as *democratic* representatives. I derive these standards from an analysis of the characteristic activity of democratic representatives. In particular, I distinguish three aspects to this activity – aims, methods, and relationships – and argue that the three virtues correspond to each of these aspects. I conclude by articulating my understanding of the relationship between democratic representation and the preferences of democratic citizens.

In Chapter 4, I introduce the first virtue of democratic representation, what I call the virtue of fair-mindedness. In doing so, I draw on my claim that democratic advocacy aims toward the well-functioning of democratic institutions. Democratic advocacy thus exhibits concern for the impact of public policies not only on one's constituents, but also on the democratic citizenry as a whole. More specifically, in engaging in democratic advocacy, a representative assesses her activity in light of its impact on the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Now, the preservation of civic equality is crucial for preserving the legitimacy of democratic institutions. For this reason, good democratic representatives are ones who have and act effectively on a proper understanding of civic equality – specifically in respect of how the realization of civic equality in a democratic polity can legitimate democratic authority.

To be properly sensitive to civic equality, in turn, is to further civic equality in light of the ways in which civic equality legitimates democratic authority. I distinguish three different approaches to civic equality: the *formal approach*, the *gap approach*, and the *threshold approach*. The formal approach conceives of civic equality as occurring when citizens have the same rights and entitlements. The gap approach identifies civic equality as being achieved when differences among citizens' control of political resources are minimized. The threshold approach understands civic equality as requiring all citizens to possess the minimal political resources necessary for exercising their rights and privileges as citizens. Distinguishing these approaches will show that good democratic representatives seek not only to protect the formal political rights and privileges of all citizens, but also to counterbalance the accumulation of power that, in producing

systemic inequalities, undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Good democratic representatives must balance all three approaches to civic equality.

Chapter 5 explores the meaning of the second virtue of democratic representation, the virtue of critical trust building. Good democratic representatives do not merely employ the methods characteristic of democratic advocacy; that is, the methods that increase the participation of democratic citizens. Rather, good democratic representatives employ these methods properly. More specifically, the methods of good democratic representatives develop citizens' capacities to have critical trust in their government. Thus, good democratic representatives employ methods with the aim of developing and utilizing the critical capacities of all citizens, so that citizens can be self-governing.

In Chapter 6, I argue that good democratic representatives exhibit the virtue of good gatekeeping when they excel at cultivating and sustaining political relationships with marginalized citizens, which makes the polity more inclusive. The relevant political relationship with citizens is one in which there is a kind of reciprocated recognition among citizens and their representatives. A significant part of this chapter is devoted to defining this political relationship, one that I term "a mutual relationship." With this definition in place, I argue that good democratic representatives advocate in a democratic fashion when they seek mutual relations that maximize inclusion. In particular, they need to seek mutual relations with their political opponents, the dispossessed, and the marginalized. Moreover, good democratic representatives can also promote mutual recognition that consciously excludes some citizens in the service of including others.

In Chapter 7, I conclude by examining how the virtues of democratic representation apply to democratic representatives faced with nonideal circumstances. I contend that the virtues should be used for identifying *preferable* democratic representatives. After defining what I mean by preferable, I examine how judgments of preferable democratic representatives are system-dependent. I then highlight one difficulty facing good democratic representatives – namely, that the three virtues of democratic representation can come into tension with one another. In the real world, it is not easy to be a good democratic representative. The tensions that can, in nonideal circumstances, arise between these different virtues require good democratic representatives to understand the distinctive dangers posed by democratic representation, as well as the benefits that it promises. When the virtues come into conflict with each other, good democratic representatives balance

the different virtues in ways that negotiate the dangers of each. Chapter 7 also examines the distinctive problems that these conflicts can pose for descriptive representatives.

In light of these problems, one might be tempted to conclude that the democratic virtues are too idealistic for existing political realities. But that would be a mistake. Even in nonideal circumstances, the virtues can still guide citizens in their choice among available representatives. They can also help citizens avoid bad democratic representatives. Moreover, an understanding of ways in which, under nonideal circumstances, the virtues can pull a representative in opposing directions will help democratic citizens assess their representatives appropriately, in light of those circumstances.