

DISCUSSION

Who is ‘we’?

Evert van der Zweerde

The solution ... consists in the reconstitution of a common world
*Pierre Rosanvallon, 2006*¹

Or is it true The Common Ground for me is without you
Oh is it true There's no Ground Common enough for me and you.
*Lou Reed, 1989*²

A question that has been haunting the liberal-democratic project since the 1960s – and here we must straightaway distinguish this ‘project’ from ‘real existing liberal democracy’ – was revived not so long ago by Jürgen Habermas in his famous discussion with Joseph Ratzinger: ‘The theme that has been proposed for our discussion [‘Pre-political moral conditions of a liberal state,’ EvdZ] recalls a question that Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde formulated in the mid-1960s as follows: whether a liberal, secularized state feeds on normative presuppositions that it cannot itself guarantee.’³

Under present-day conditions, I believe, the question should be given a more radical twist. It is no longer – if it ever was – a matter of whether or not a liberal-democratic *Rechtsstaat* (hereafter: LDR) can *guarantee* its own normative preconditions, but of whether a real LDR can be kept from *undermining* them. In other words, assuming it can be realized, the question is whether the liberal-democratic project is not potentially self-destructive with respect to its very ‘non-political preconditions.’ As Michael Walzer has suggested, ‘Liberalism is a self-subverting doctrine; for that reason, it really does require periodic communitarian correction.’⁴ Rather than remain at the more conceptual level of norms and principles, I propose to bring the question down to earth and, in doing so, closer to Steven Winter’s inspiring paper. That can be accomplished by stating that any political reality, any ‘real existing regime’ including a LDR, ultimately relies on the presence of a sufficiently large number of people embodying those norms and princi-

1 Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), 312; transl. EvdZ.

2 Lou Reed, ‘Good evening Mr. Waldheim,’ on *New York* (Sire Records, 1989), track 11.

3 Jürgen Habermas, ‘Vorpolitische Grundlagen des demokratischen Rechtsstaates,’ in *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2005), 16, transl. EvdZ; reference is to: Ernst Wolfgang Böckenförde, ‘Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation (1967),’ in *Recht, Staat, Freiheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 112.

4 Michael Walzer, ‘The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism,’ *Thinking Politically; Essays in Political Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 105.

ples. That might be the case consciously and explicitly in the form of political ideologies or convictions, or implicitly and unconsciously in the form of habits, attitudes, and beliefs. Norms and principles are embodied in deeds too, including 'action' in Hannah Arendt's sense, but not limited to it. Many, but not all deeds are partly discursive in nature, meaning that they are or they include 'speech acts.'

What do I mean by that and why does it bring me closer to Winter? We could agree that, whenever a consumer purchases something, whether it is an SUV or a wall-unit (Section 2), to use Winter's examples, she or he effectively reproduces the principles and properties of a free market economy. Similarly, we could say that whenever a citizen votes, expresses an opinion, or reads a newspaper, in effect she or he reproduces the electoral system, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press, and in so doing reaffirms the normatives and renews the cognitive preconditions of active citizenship, *without necessarily being aware of it*. Activities of that kind have become, in Hegelian terms, *Sittlichkeit*. Given that *Sittlichkeit* has developed into a quasi-natural way of living and being, it goes largely unnoticed by those who practise it. *We are doing it without knowing what we are doing*. One of Hegel's more famous aphorisms is the following: 'Reading the newspaper in the morning is a kind of realistic morning blessing.'⁵ We might not always be aware of the fact that reading the paper in the morning (instead of praying in church, synagogue or mosque) is indeed participation in a worldly ritual which, by its familiar repetition, helps us through our days. It gives us not only orientation and direction, but as Hegel suggests, certainty: '... that same certainty ... of knowing where one is at.' Many of us will recognize the picture – morning coffee, newspaper, fresh croissant – but it is, at the same time, hopelessly out-dated. Not only did Hegel know *which* newspaper to read, he could expect his co-citizens (or those who made a difference in his community) to have read *the same* newspaper – or one containing the same news. And he could assume that, even if they appreciated the world differently, perhaps because they differed in political orientation, religion, or were differently placed in society, they looked at it from the same *single vantage point*. The key word here is indeed *subjectivity*, as Winter (Section 3) emphasizes. Hegel's morning-paper reading is an instance of civic subjectivity in that it acts as a vehicle to make the individual subject part of an intersubjective world.⁶ It is not by accident that many newspapers have 'world' in their title. The best case in point is the French daily *Le monde*. 'Monde' means both world – as opposed to earth (*terre*) – and people. In reference to people, 'monde' can be used

5 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 'Aphorismen aus Hegels Wastebook (1803-1806),' in *Jenaer Schriften 1801-1807* [Werke, Bd. 2], ed. Eva Moldenhauer & Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 547, transl. EvdZ.

6 Note also, that reading the paper and 'forming one's opinion' about the reported events, and *then* going out into the real world is, within the realm of objective spirit, the transition from *Moralität* (which tends to oppose itself on subjective moral grounds to objective socio-political reality, which is what happens when the news provokes our protest), to *Sittlichkeit*, into which we, more or less willingly, embed ourselves every day and with which we must reconcile ourselves through the recognition of its 'rationality.'

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to indicate everybody – as in ‘tout le monde [everybody]’ – or it can be used in a phrase such as ‘il y a du monde’ – indicating, for example, that there are customers in a shop. What does reading *Le monde* over coffee and croissants *do to us*? Clearly, it makes us part of a world, or more precisely it reproduces our being part of a world. To be still more precise, it reproduces the participation of an ‘I’ in a ‘we’ that populates a world.⁷ The question then is: which ‘world’ and which ‘we’? It is at this point that we should address the question of what are the *real* preconditions of that political community of which LDR is the objective political form, which is to say we should examine its subjective human material, endowed with its convictions, ideals and virtues.

Section 2 of Winter’s paper is precisely about this human material. And there is a particular problem before us here: namely, that humankind has lost its political innocence. In a sense, ‘we’ – and I think this ‘we’ is increasingly global – are beyond ideology. We *know* from writers such as Marcuse, Althusser, and Baudrillard that we are being subjectivized as atomized and alienated consumerist narcissistic fetishist individuals, yet we continue to act as if individual freedom is our *nature*, vainly protesting against ‘the system’ that inflicts all this individualism and consumerism on us. If ‘the “freedom” of modern subjectivity is its own kind of prison’ (Section 3), we may wonder who or what put us in that prison in the first place, and who or what is keeping us there. If we abstain, as I think we must, from conspiracy theories and from the kind of metaphysics which suggests that ‘the Enlightenment’ is a historical *actor* capable of doing and willing, we should ask ourselves *why* we knowingly remain in our prison. It seems to me that we then have to face too the question of what is so *attractive* about that prison. At the same time, we should ask ourselves what are the conditions for *perceiving* the problem as such: are these the birth pangs of a new and global critical humankind, or the last convulsions of a free-floating intelligentsia that never had any real impact in the first place? In addition, and more radically, we must inquire as to the preconditions for this type of critical self-investigation: if, as Winter suggests, this is the reality, its preconditions must be real too.

In other words, if we – author and reader of this piece – are the products of ‘processes [which] are part of a *system* of social formation whose import is to create a certain kind of modern subject’ (Section 2), then we – at least Foucault, Baudrillard, and Winter – are not *blind* to it. It may well be true that ‘reification in this form is the dirty little secret of contemporary liberal democracy’ (Section 4), but if that were the *whole* truth, then the very claim would make no sense to us. Indeed, it might not even be *reflexively possible*, so that we should be unable to articulate it other than by accident. Hence there are two notions of ‘us’ to be distinguished. The first is ‘us’ as system-products, the modern bourgeois individual

7 In using the indefinite article, I do not mean to suggest that there is a determinate number of numerically different ‘worlds’ – rather, I suggest that each of ‘us’ – any ‘us’ – participates in a plurality of partly mutually excluding, partly overlapping, ‘worlds.’

subjects who, to quote Althusser's phrase, 'walk all by themselves'.⁸ The second is 'us' as critical analysts of that same system. The question then, is whether the relation between those two instances of 'us' is abstract and *external*, presupposing a 'split' between our social and material existence on the one hand, and our 'mind' on the other; or whether, by contrast, it is an *internal* one in which *relating* both consciously and critically, perhaps also tragically, to our social and material existence is part of our very condition and constitution as human beings. The latter point of view, I feel, would be both more dialectical and more materialistic.

The underlying subject of Steven Winter's paper is the relationship between two principles: democracy and freedom. During the last two centuries, several of the better minds have articulated the tension between those two principles. While some have perceived a paradox, others have detected a contradiction. Many have argued against the idea that democracy is one single notion, let alone a single package or a one-size-fits-all model, and have distinguished, in the wake of Isaiah Berlin, different notions of freedom. Winter joins that chorus. At the same time, the global spread of market economy capitalism-cum-representative democracy, has fed the idea that in fact democracy and liberalism are barely separable, if at all. For many people around the world liberal democracy is a pleonastic expression: if it's not liberal, it's not real democracy. That assumption cannot be questioned often enough, and it has been by authors as diverse as Michael Oakeshott, Carl Schmitt, Norberto Bobbio, Chantal Mouffe, Fareed Zakaria, and even Jürgen Habermas. The last of those names is famous for his attempt to develop a new position: deliberative democracy, which would occupy the middle ground between a republican conception of democracy on the one hand and a liberal conception on the other. The two extremes are, according to Habermas, respectively *overdemanding*, and *underdemanding* the citizen.⁹ The familiar critique of the Habermasian position is that it is biased towards the 'autonomous individual rational subject' of the Enlightenment of which Winter, like so many others, is critical. That is due to Habermas's focus on deliberation as the means to reach consensus about the constitutional and, *ipso facto*, the constitutive principles of the (liberal-)democratic *Rechtsstaat*. For that reason alone, Winter's argument deserves our attention. As gradually becomes clear in his paper, Winter's position belongs to the 'republican' family and is explicitly critical of liberalism. The Habermasian question would then be whether Winter is not 'overdemanding' the citizen: demanding the extensive and frequent active political participation of all. I think it is not, but it may be a point for debate.

One cornerstone of my comment is the intuition that 'we' are at the historical point of *leaving* an era in which many people would think, and believe it with good reason, that humankind has invented a regime, called liberal democracy, beyond which nothing better could be devised. I suggest characterizing the regime as a

8 Louis Althusser, 'Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État,' in *Positions* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1976), 133.

9 See Jürgen Habermas, 'Drei normative Modelle der Demokratie,' in *Die Einbeziehung des Anders* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 277-92.

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liberal-democratic Rechtsstaat (LDR). The notion of 'Rechtsstaat' is notoriously difficult to translate into English: 'rule of law' does not suffice, because 'state' involves more than just 'rule'; 'law,' moreover, is ambiguous in itself, at least from a continental 'European' point of view, which begins with a contrast between 'law' (Gesetz, loi, wet, ley, закон) and 'right' (Recht, droit, recht, derecho, право). However, one could argue that 'law' has the advantage of *articulating* the inherent ambiguity of something which is in a way 'absolute' but at the same time must be 'positive' and hence 'posited' (*gesetzt*).

Employing the distinction between 'form of state' and 'form of government' that we find in Rousseau among others, and using 'regime' to denote their combination, I suggest the following definition: LDR means a regime that derives its legitimacy – as a matter of principle – from the expressed will of a political people – *dèmos* – and in which rule of law guarantees (of course: ideally) justice and the equal liberty – *égalité* – of all (adult) citizens.¹⁰ My general hypothesis at this point is that 'Western academia' as well as 'Western political reality' – bearing in mind that large parts of the world (ruling elites, local academia) are 'Western' in that respect – have failed to produce a more accurate definition. They are therefore condemned to a fundamentally *defensive, conservative*, and potentially 'reactionary' position. However, their inability to invent something better is not so much a matter of limited intellectual power as of attachment to a regime that we appreciate and enjoy both as academics and as citizens. LDR is not simply a theoretical construction nor just an idea, for it is a concrete political life-form. Indeed, it is part of what makes these very sentences and their public discussion possible. We should, I think, openly admit that we do find it difficult to conceive of anything better.

Winter starts from the double premise of the global spread of market economy under the neoliberal aegis; and the equally global spread of democracy. The latter, unlike the former, comes in spurts, or waves. Winter suggests that the first of them, after 1989, was primarily individualist and libertarian while the second, which started in 2010 in Tunisia, is primarily populist and egalitarian (1). I would add that the first wave was also primarily institutionalist, seeking to establish what Pierre Rosanvallon has aptly labelled 'la démocratie électorale-représentative': a parliamentary system, plurality of political parties, free, universal, secret, repeated, and contested elections. The second spurt, by contrast, is primarily activist or actionist, an aspect to which Winter turns appreciatively in his paper (Section 3). In Rosanvallon's tripartite model, democracy is seen as consisting of three dimensions: the electoral-representative system already mentioned, the plurality of forms of organized distrust which he labels 'counter-democracy,' and 'le travail du politique [work of the political].' In other words, 'the reflexive and deliberative

10 The notion of *égalité* is adopted from Étienne Balibar, *La crainte des masses* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), 20; on the idea that 'democratic legitimacy is the only one available today,' see Jürgen Habermas, 'The Political; The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology,' in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta, & Jonathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 24.

activity, through which the rules for constituting a common world are elaborated: determination of principles of justice; arbitration of the situations and interests of various groups; articulations of the private and the public.¹¹ The model is particularly useful for understanding recent developments, since the meaning of 'counter-democracy' and 'the work of the political' emerges only after the first dimension is sufficiently firmly in place. It explains why we can indeed characterize the establishment of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and in post-Apartheid South Africa as a *wave*. It stands in contrast to the uprisings in a number of Arab countries, the Occupy movement in Western countries, and the mass protests in Israel, Chile, India, Senegal, Russia, and Malaysia, for example, which make up not so much the next wave of democratization, but rather a series of *democratic impulses* taking place against the backdrop of a *pretended*, but malfunctioning LDR. Their impulses have yielded new democratic repertoires which were quickly adopted elsewhere and which include the support of 'new social media,' even though the influence of new media is easily overestimated given that the powers-that-be too make use of them,¹² and even though it is still unclear where the use of such media will lead.

While not necessarily disagreeing here with Winter's analysis nor his appreciation, I would add a comment on both 'waves' and 'spurts.' The establishment of LDR in Central and Eastern Europe took place amid the ruins of 'real existing socialism,' with its faded claim of popular or people's democracy, for even if in some of those countries there was initial popular support, by 1989 it had long evaporated. LDR was widespread indeed, but it should not be overlooked that only those countries which became members of the European Union maintained more or less stable LDR's. There is a widely held belief that countries such as Slovakia or Bulgaria remain liberal democracies *only* because of EU pressure, while Eastern neighbours such as Belarus, Russia, or Georgia demonstrate the absence of indigenous democratic traditions. Contrary to that belief I would suggest that *all* countries concerned, both new EU member-states and non-members, underwent a transfer to the *already degenerated* form of LDR that has been produced in 'the West.' If critical analysts in the West, of which Winter is one, depreciatively diagnose *our* LDR's as marked by passive consumerist electorates, a marketization of multiparty systems, commercialized media that seek sensation rather than truth, populist rhetoric, blurred borders between politics and business, and manipulation of public opinion by spin doctors, then that is exactly what countries East of the Berlin Wall adopted from the West. The same can be said for the other principal trend, the introduction of market capitalism. What in Western polities is 'softened' by the moral standards and political virtues of parts of the population appears in its raw and untamed form in the East. Are not *we* seeing – in *their* disappointment and lack of interest evident from minimal participation, minimal turnout and minimal interest in the *res publica* – the deplorable state of

11 Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie*, 297-98, transl. EvdZ.

12 See, for example, Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion; The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (London: Penguin, 2011), and the review by James Kirchick, 'The Revolution Will not be Tweeted,' *The American Interest* 7 (2012): 97-102.

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‘our own’ political reality? A reality we find increasingly difficult to identify with and to consider ‘ours’?

The conservative interjection at this point would be that the transfer of democratic repertoires happened to occur at a low point in the cycle of corruption and degeneration that marks any regime. The dynamic version, by contrast, would be that Western LDR has indeed lost much of its energy and appeal through a variety of causes¹³ and needs to receive its impulses from elsewhere. One could think here of the ‘conservative-revivalist’ way in which Jürgen Habermas has attempted with his ‘post-secular turn’¹⁴ to tap into the ‘inspiring energy’ (Habermas’s words, *EvdZ*) of religious traditions. As if, in the words of Aakash Singh, ‘the secular would assimilate the religious like a blood infusion, becoming more vibrant and stronger thereby, but not losing its advantage.’¹⁵ But there is a more radical perspective too, at which Winter’s paper hints, a perspective which distinguishes between those ‘habitual’ creative crises that are part of any democratic regime and a more profound and structural crisis that calls for a reinvention.¹⁶ I believe the latter to be the case, and I read Winter’s paper as ‘symptomatic’ of a new situation, one in which those impulses are coming neither from the inside of ‘real existing LDR,’ nor only from its ‘underside’ – the marginalized, the underprivileged, the *sans-papiers* and the rest. Rather, and perhaps for the first time, its impulses are now coming from *outside* LDR. New democratic impulses and repertoires no longer come from the West and spread to the Rest, but are articulated in the ‘third World’ from which they emerge and are quickly adopted elsewhere. That is not to be misunderstood as a naively optimistic response to, say, the Arab Spring – nor to Occupy, for that matter – but as an attempt to emphasize, with Winter, that we are witnesses to nascent democratic repertoires and regimes that ‘we’ can no longer claim to be normatively – let alone politically – the masters of.

To put it perhaps rather bluntly, the fundamental problem to my mind is the following. All over the world, both in stable liberal democracies such as the Netherlands or the USA and in the wide variety of more or less authoritarian and illiberal regimes, people in general, and intellectual elites in particular, are weary of their governments. Even in states with freely elected governments people dislike politics as much as they despise individual politicians, and yet they seem incapable of producing anything more satisfactory than improved versions of liberal democracy. That is a great and increasingly global source of frustration and discontent. It is not a political problem only, but a political-philosophical one too. That is especially true with respect to the question of the *practical* dimension of ‘practical philosophy’: to what extent is it not merely *about* praxis – ethics and politics – but

13 Think of authors like Colin Crouch or Pierre Manent here.

14 A turn that started with *Glauben und Wissen* and was given political form in his discussion with Joseph Ratzinger (the Cardinal, now Pope Benedict XVI).

15 Aakash Singh, ‘Habermas’ Postsecularism: The Penetration/Preservation of the (European) Political Public Sphere,’ in *Discoursing the Post-Secular; Essays on the Habermasian Post-Secular Turn*, ed. Péter Losonczi & Aakash Singh (Vienna: LIT-Verlag, 2010), 76.

16 See several of the contributions to the volume referred to above: *Creative Crises of Democracy*, ed. Joris Gijzenbergh, Saskia Hollander, Tim Houwen & Wim de Jong (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012).

also itself an active part of it? It seems the only possible positive direction that can be taken is that disillusion and discontent might serve as a breeding ground for new 'we's' – which leads us to what I think is the key category of Winter's paper.

My suggestion – and alongside the intuition that we are in the process of leaving the 'era of LDR' this forms the other cornerstone of my comment – is that 'we' has become a problematic category in unprecedented ways. 'We,' this 'dangerous pronoun' as Richard Sennett called it, is surely always contested,¹⁷ and that has to do with two things. The first is the *necessarily polemical* nature of 'we,' in that 'we' always implies 'non-we,' either a real 'them' or a symbolic 'not-us.' At this point, the category to be invoked is Carl Schmitt's 'logic of the political [*Logik des Politischen*],' bearing in mind that the opposition of 'we' and 'them' always *can*, as a polemical consequence, lead to the 'friend-enemy' distinction. However, it can also be turned into the basis of agonistic democratic politics.¹⁸ The second is the *unclear connection* between what 'we' means and what it refers to – *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in the Fregean sense. While it is generally clear *what* 'we' means, *who* it means is symptomatically ambiguous. I shall elaborate on this point mostly by highlighting the use of 'we' both in the paper by Steven Winter and to a lesser extent in a recent book by the French political philosopher Pierre Manent. I suggest the following working definition of 'we': 'A "we" is any group of people performatively constituting itself through the utterances of at least one element of the group.' One key problem in the world today, I suggest, is that 'we' are no longer clear about *which* 'we' we should identify ourselves with politically. Occupy, for example, can be characterized as a world-wide democratic impulse that transcends the habitual 'territorial division' of the world into 'nation-states' and variants of them, reflecting the fact that many of the problems that any 'we' faces today cannot be reasonably addressed at the level of national government. That invites the conclusion that 'national government' is part of the problem rather than part of the solution. An alternative characterization is that Occupy constitutes a set of nationally-embedded democratic impulses which, not by accident of course, bear great resemblance to each other from country to country. If we ought to think, as we probably must, in terms of 'multiple we's' that overlap, intersect and criss-cross from one place to another, then one must ask where the *practical* limit of such pluralism is, given the powerful human desire to belong to a single 'we,' to something one can identify with?

My point here is that it has become problematic how a 'we' perceives 'the world,' how a 'we' gathers and selects the information that underpins what it says about the world, and how that 'we' evaluates or even judges events. From the very first sentence of his paper, it is clear that Winter means to speak about "The world as a

17 See Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 136-48.

18 See Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Humblot & Duncker, [1932] 1987), 26-28, or idem, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1996] 2007), 25-27; for the Leftist appropriation of Schmitt, see in particular Chantal Mouffe, ed., *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999).

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whole': "Two principal trends define this post-Cold War, post-9/11 era of globalization."¹⁹ There is a 'we' that, first and foremost, is made up of the author of the paper and its intended readers. That 'we' lives in an 'era of globalization' which began with two important historical markers: the end of the Cold War (1989) and the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City (2001). While for Winter that defines 'real world time' and provides the basis for his analysis of the 'two principal trends,' *we* – the invited reader of this comment and I – may wonder if other 'we's' – including 'non-Western ones – might not define a different world. After all, however dramatic and unacceptable the 'terrorist' – i.e., *political* – attack on the Twin Towers might have been, its societal impact and symbolic value, including the 'apocalyptic' dimension it attained, were much stronger in the USA than in Europe. Europe had already seen plenty of terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s, and experiencing warfare on its own soil has historically been the rule there rather than the exception. From a European perspective, therefore, it is contestable rather than obvious that pre-9/11 and post-9/11 are different stages in world history. When Pierre Manent suggests that 9/11 'for most of us... represented a catastrophe inaugurating a new epoch,' we should, again, ask who exactly this 'we [*nous*]' is, and I suggest that a phrase such as that is part of the *constitution* of a 'we' (rather than that it can be assumed to exist already). We do find a much more critical and nuanced position in Jacques Derrida's and Jürgen Habermas's discussions of the events on 11 September 2001.²⁰ The 'us' vs. 'them' construction that was made possible or perhaps even enhanced by 9/11 served both al-Qaeda and the Bush administration because of its simplifying potential with respect to the actual complexity of overlapping 'we's.' After 9/11, the world became, or was made, both more simple and more dichotomous.

With these three admittedly general concepts – 'LDR,' 'we' and 'world' – I hope I have made relevant comments on Winter's paper, appreciating it critically as a contribution to a debate that is only just beginning. To return finally to the initial question of whether Winter's version of democratic republicanism is *overdemanding*: I believe it is not. Winter claims, and rightly I think, that 'self-governance, whether democratic or personal, is a social phenomenon,' and that it 'requires politics' (Section 4). He notes that 'freedom, democracy, and self-governance are not benefits nor states-of-being that one just "has"' but instead are 'fragile social creations that require active cultivation and constant maintenance'. That is, we could say, what freedom and democracy are 'objectively' like. It does not in itself imply that 'we' *must* pick up the gauntlet thrown down before us by the 'second wave of democratization' which I have anyway suggested should be seen as a series of democratic impulses rather than as a wave. I do agree that we ought to pick the gauntlet up, but we should also see that as a conscious and political, hence contestable action on our part, one that actually *splits* a 'we' taken out of its com-

19 Paper by Steven Winter, first page, first sentence.

20 Pierre Manent, *Democracy Without Nations? The Fate of Self-Government in Europe* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2007), 27; orig.: *La raison des nations; réflexions sur la démocratie en Europe* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 41; Giovanni Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror; Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

fort zone by global political events. The strength of Winter's paper is in what Kantians would call a hypothetical imperative: 'If we are to take initiative with respect to our collective fate and do so with any hope of success, we must engage with one another as neither a means nor an end in him/herself, but as partners and collaborators'. That is very true, but the crucial question remains: who is 'we'? If 'we' wants to reclaim the state and make it perform its key function of mastering the spontaneous processes of society and economy over and above the liberal or neoliberal requirement of protecting property, keeping the streets safe and guaranteeing free competition on the global market, then that 'we' must accept that its task can no longer be managed at the national level. That is the case both for existing LDR and for 'illiberal' regimes. Some would argue here in favour of the non-democratic alternative, and some even fear that a regime that combines prosperity with authoritarianism – the 'Chinese model' – might be preferred by many. It might be the case that that model has a certain attraction. It stops being attractive, however, once we realize that the key objectives of government are threefold. Government needs to provide an institutional and legal framework for the spontaneous processes of economy and society, including those of academia, the present discussion included; it would like to contain the undesired side-effects of those processes including poverty, pollution, exploitation, elitism, and so on; and it wishes to give people a sense of 'political belonging.' The problem with the non-democratic alternative to that is not that states like Russia or China are not strong enough, but that – capital-statist in the case of Russia, state-capitalist in the case of China – they are themselves *part* of those processes rather than any means of mastering them. As a result, they might realize their first objective and partly their second, but they will never achieve their third. To end with a daring hypothesis: national government at this point in history is the main obstacle to democratic politics and, in the long run, to freedom. That is because it cannot but fail to address the major matters that determine the lives of any 'we' – matters that in their nature and scale are transnational, if not outright global. At the same time, we can learn from Steven Winter that the nature of self-governance is such that it always needs a 'local' dimension with things done as far as practicable face-to-face. It cannot be limited to its institutional dimension, but requires the practical dimension of 'action' as well. The big question for the near future then, becomes not what 'we' *means* philosophically, but what it *denotes* politically.