POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

a discussion of political rationality

initiated by

Stanley Benn
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Stanley Benn

with comments by

Richard Wollheim
Alan Ryan
Brian Barry
Martin Hollis
Carole Pateman

and a Foreword by

G. W. Mortimore

Australian National University Press
Canberra, A.C.T.
Norwalk, Conn., 1978
Mr Bunce's reasons for joining a demonstration

'... Do you really believe that the ballot will become the law of the land any sooner because you incur this danger and inconvenience?'

'Look here, Mr. Finn; I don't believe the sea will become any fuller because the Piddle runs into it out of the Dorsetshire fields; but I do believe that the waters from all the countries is what makes the ocean. I shall help; and it's my duty to help.'

'It's your duty as a respectable citizen with a wife and family, to stay at home.'

'If everybody with a wife and family was to say so, there'd be none there but roughs, and then where should we be? ... If every man with a wife and family was to show hisself in the streets to-night, we should have the ballot before Parliament breaks up, and if none of 'em don't do it, we shall never have the ballot. If that's so, a man's duty's clear enough. He ought to go, though he'd two wives and families.' And he went.

A. Trollope, Phineas Finn (1869), Chap. XXV
The lead paper in this symposium, by Stanley Benn, was presented to a conference in 1975, sponsored jointly by the University of Bristol and the Society for Critical Philosophy. Richard Wollheim, Brian Barry, Alan Ryan, and Martin Hollis were all present at the conference, and their comments are based on contributions they made there. The comment by Carole Pateman was a specially solicited contribution to this volume. Before writing her own paper, Dr Pateman saw not only the lead paper, and the contributions of the other commentators, but also a first draft of Stanley Benn's Rejoinder. This has since been revised, to take account of Dr Pateman's remarks. Geoffrey Mortimore, having read the final version of all the contributions, charts the course of the discussion in his Foreword.

Acknowledgment is due to Professor Körner of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Bristol, for inviting and welcoming the participants to the 1975 Bristol Conference, to the Department of Philosophy, Research School of the Social Sciences of The Australian National University, for helping to make the symposium available at a price within the reach of students, to Ms Anne van der Vliet and Mr David Dumaresq for their help in preparing and typing the manuscript and to the latter for correcting the proofs.
The contributors to this volume discuss whether and in what sense participation in mass political activity can be rational. Such participation is to be understood as including a wide range of activities — embracing membership of political organisations, demonstrating, and voting.

There are two kinds of interest in the rationality of these activities. First, there is an interest in the possibility of developing theories which explain and predict political activities, by ascribing a degree of rationality to political agents. Since democratic states in particular require a relatively high degree of participation to operate successfully, one naturally wants to know whether there are reasons which their citizens might have that would explain their willingness to participate, or whether explanations must be sought in non-rational terms. Second, those who value a measure of political participation in the community are interested in justifying the evaluative judgment that participation is rational, in showing that there are good reasons for anyone to participate, and in answering those who say that there are not.

Why focus on the rationality of participation, rather than its fairness, or its tendency to promote desirable states of affairs? For both theoretical and justificatory purposes, showing that political participation is rational is thought to have more powerful consequences than showing it to be fair or conducive to certain benefits. The
latter arguments will allow us to explain participation only within communities where fairness or particular benefits are valued enough to motivate a sufficient number of individuals to participate; and they will command assent only from individuals who share these values. However, if there are reasons for political participation which make it rational, then neither explanation nor justification depends on the acceptance of any particular ethical or political values — by the individuals subsumed under an explanatory theory, or the individuals subjected to justificatory argument.

The suggestion that participation is not rational rests on the argument that whatever the political goals at stake, any given individual's participatory contribution usually makes no difference to whether these political goals are achieved. Given that participation involves quite definite costs for the individual in terms of his private goals, it will generally be rational (so the argument goes) for an individual to choose not to participate. His private ends provide him with a reason for not participating; his political ends do not provide him with a countervailing reason for participation, since his participation will make no difference to the outcome.

Mr Benn seeks to meet this challenge within two self-imposed constraints. First, he does not suggest that any particular ends — either political or private — are ones which any rational man will pursue; nor that any particular values like fairness (in terms of which participation might be argued for) are ones which any rational man would hold; nor that any particular actions (like voting) are ones which any rational man would value for their own sake. In Benn's view, therefore, someone who argues that participation is necessary to create a certain kind of community, or that it is a requirement of fairness, or that it is somehow intrinsically a civic duty, is not showing that participation is rational tout court — only that it is at best rational for men who hold these particular values.

Second, Benn wishes to meet the challenge in a way
that allows that in some circumstances it may be rational not to participate. A reply to the challenge ‘proves’ too much if it suggests that participation is always the course of action it is rational for a man to pursue.

Benn’s strategy is to argue that participation can be rational, under certain conditions, for any individual who has political values. If an individual’s political values include the achievement of a state of affairs $S$, but his participation will make no difference to the achievement of $S$, it can still be rational for him to participate, if and only if:

(i) there exists a convention defining the participatory activity as a way of manifesting commitment to the political value ($S$);

(ii) he gives priority to acting qua political agent or citizen over action in other (e.g. private) roles.

If these conditions are satisfied, then the individual has a reason for participating: that his action maintains consistency with avowed principle. Here Benn introduces a conception of rationality very different from the instrumental, means-end notion of rationality employed in decision-theory. The problem of the rationality of political participation is posed as a problem of how an individual’s participation could be seen as a means to his political ends. Benn’s contribution is to suggest that an individual’s participation can be rational by virtue of its consistency with his political principles or beliefs. He claims for this conception of rationality the advantage that it exhibits as rational actions done for reasons of principle, which promise no advantageous outcomes.

The inclusion of the second condition in Benn’s account allows for the possibility of non-participation being the rational course of action, if an individual rank-orders acting in other-than-political roles higher in certain circumstances.

The discussion of Benn’s argument ranges over four issues. Firstly, is there really a problem about the instrumental rationality of political participation? Barry in particular seeks to argue that it is possible to provide
an instrumental justification for political participation. Secondly, is Benn’s account conceptually adequate? Some of his critics suggest either that his concept of rationality is unclear, or that Benn’s putative rational political agent is actually someone who is performing a non-rational expressive act. Benn meets these suggestions in his rejoinder by articulating his notion of rationality as consistency with principle. Another question about the conceptual adequacy of Benn’s account focuses on his use (in condition (ii) above) of the notion of a political role. Some of his critics question whether there is such a thing as a political or civic role, which an individual might rank-order against other roles. The dispute about this question clearly still has a lot of mileage left in it.

The third issue raised in discussion concerns the conventions referred to in Benn’s condition (i). Even if Benn’s conditions (i) and (ii) are satisfied, would it be rational to participate if there were no rationale for the convention which defined that form of participation as a way of manifesting commitment to the agent’s political values? Benn claims, as a rationale for one prominent convention, that a conceptual scheme which links voting with the manifestation of certain political principles possesses a functional rationality, since mass participation in liberal democratic forms of action contributes significantly to the realisation of those principles.

Finally, even if Benn’s account is conceptually adequate, and there is a rationale for some of his consistency conventions, is the account of rational political participation of any use to the political scientist? How plausible is it as a description of the way individuals choose whether to participate? And does it matter to the explanatory and predictive usefulness of his account if it is not an accurate description of the way most people make their decisions?
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This paper is a by-product of a larger study of the concepts of rationality employed in the social sciences, and of a particular study of political theories that rely heavily on the kind of decision-theory models of rational choice used, for instance, in microeconomics. I shall say something about writers in this genre who find themselves confronted with the conclusion that choosing to participate as voters or as rank-and-file activists in the politics of the modern national democratic state can rarely be rational. Such a conclusion is surely disconcerting to anyone reared on the teaching of Aristotle, or of Rousseau, or of J. S. Mill, that a person attains his full stature as a rational, responsible moral being only through political participation. And since the conventional wisdom seems to be that a democracy can function — or function well — only if a fairly sizeable proportion of its electorate exercises the right to vote, takes a rational interest in political affairs, and so on, it is discouraging to learn that behaving like this is generally speaking irrational.

There is no contradiction, of course, in saying that sometimes it is irrational to take a lot of trouble to acquire rational beliefs on which to act; for the action may be so unimportant that the trouble is not worth the taking. In some matters, as businessmen well know, it is
practically rational (though not epistemically rational) * not to bother too much about rational grounds of belief, but to accept beliefs on hearsay, to act by rule of thumb, or even on the toss of a coin. For epistemic rationality costs money, and like any business cost must justify itself in its payoffs. The difficulty in the case of political participation is that a system would be self-stultifying if it depended on numbers of people forming rational beliefs about politics and acting on them, while yet for almost anyone to do that would be to expend effort he could use to better advantage elsewhere.

Having probed such theories a little, I shall consider a possible account of political participation which will retain the essentials of the decision-theory model while sidestepping some of its dilemmas. I shall suggest that a person can have a number of preference rankings, one corresponding to each of the roles he acknowledges. These rankings would themselves be subject to a second-order ranking principle assigning precedence to one role or another according to the agent’s reading of his particular decision situation. I shall refer to such a second-order ranking as a way of life. It may itself be one of a set, any one of which an agent might adopt. Within this set would be a sub-set of ‘participationist’ ways of life, in which acting in one’s political role as citizen would almost always rank high. I then ask whether one could have a reason for selecting a participationist way of life,

*A belief is held with epistemic rationality if it is held for reasons, and if the reasons satisfy the relevant criteria for true belief. An action is practically rational if, given whatever beliefs the agent has, it is done for reasons that relate to optimising in terms of his ends. A person would exhibit practical rationality (or at any rate formal practical rationality) in embracing an epistemically irrational belief if, despite its failing to satisfy the relevant criteria of true belief, he embraced it because it made him feel good and feeling good mattered more to him than having true beliefs. Similarly, he would exhibit a high degree of epistemic rationality but be practically irrational if an obsessive concern for ensuring that his beliefs were true prevented his attaining any of his goals — even perhaps his goal of having true beliefs; for the extreme of epistemic rationality may be total scepticism. (See S. I. Benn and G. W. Mortimore (eds.), Rationality and the Social Sciences, and, in particular, the Introduction, and Chapters 1, 4, and 7.)
other than a reason relative to some still higher order ranking of options — for that leads to a regress which is either infinite or must end in an arbitrary preference. A reason of the required kind is not to be found, I think, using the means/end model of practical reason presupposed by decision theorists. But there is a more promising notion of practically rational action: an action can be rational for a person regardless of its payoff if it expresses attitudes or principles that it would be inconsistent in him not to express under appropriate conditions, given the character which he is generally content to acknowledge as his own. This is what is called being true to oneself.

II

Anthony Downs has developed a theory of democratic politics based on the postulates 'that democratic governments act rationally to maximize political support', and that since voters act rationally too, they will give their governments support under specified conditions. This is a strong explanatory hypothesis: Downs's claims for the theory that it yields determinate predictions, is falsifiable, but is in fact generally though not completely corroborated by the facts; and in so far as it is not corroborated, it raises useful questions about the area of irrationality in political behaviour. The concept of rational action employed includes not merely the formal requirements usual in theories of rational choice subject to constraint: the disposition to optimise according to a preference ordering of available options that is transitive and connected; it includes too certain substantive requirements. These can best be explained by distinguishing several conditions for rationality that Downs builds into the theory, not all of which are clearly differentiated by Downs himself, and some of which may turn out, on occasion, to preclude others.

There is, in the first place, what Downs calls 'personal rationality' — the rationality of the optimiser (or utility-maximiser) in terms of any set of ends that would count
for him as being to his advantage (benefiting him, or as in his interests). If it is difficult to formulate this restriction it is because, though such rationality is termed ‘selfish’, these ends may yet be other-regarding, even altruistic, provided that achieving them would represent, in the agent’s opinion, an increase in his ‘utility-income’. So personally rational action could be of advantage not directly to oneself, but, say, to one’s children, provided one cared about them enough to make their well-being one’s objective.

Secondly, an action would be ‘politically rational’ if it were ‘efficiently designed to achieve the consciously selected political or economic ends of the actor’. Action can be personally rational but politically irrational if it employs political means for non-political ends, such as voting Tory to placate one’s Tory wife. Because ‘ends’ is understood strictly consequentially, politically rational action is always understood in terms of outcomes altogether distinguishable from the act itself. One votes rationally if one votes not for parties, persons, or principles as such, but in the way most likely to promote the adoption of policies favouring one’s interests. This might require voting for a party one liked less if the party whose policies one liked more had no chance of being returned to power or of influencing policies implemented later on.

Political rationality can be manifested in different ways according to one’s political role (or roles) within the system. So the conditions for rational action for voters and party leaders will be correspondingly different. I shall call this notion ‘role-rationality’ — acting in ways calculated to produce the kind of outcomes for the agent that might be regarded as standard benefits for someone occupying that role in the particular game. So a chess-player would exhibit role-rationality in sacrificing a piece in order to capture his opponent’s queen, but not because he wanted a favour from him outside the game. This is a gloss on Downs, but not, I think, inconsistent with his general approach.
Downs's theory of democratic government depends crucially on voters' acting with political rationality — voting to maximise the benefits they expect from the policies governments adopt. But it depends equally on another implied condition of voters' role-rationality, that they act so as to play their part in selecting a government efficiently. I call this functional rationality, since it makes it a condition for rational action in a given role that the act shall contribute in the appropriate way to the maintenance of the system as a going concern. Again, this is an exegetical gloss; Downs does not put it quite in this way.

Downs wants to show that a democratic system works because:

(1) people in general act with personal rationality;
(2) in political situations, personal rationality is manifested as political rationality;
(3) seeking to act with political rationality in their respective roles, people will exhibit role-rationality;
(4) in exhibiting role-rationality, people will do what is necessary for the continuing operation of the system, i.e. they will exhibit functional rationality.

Unfortunately, as Downs himself recognises, there is a dangerous weakness in this structure. If personal rationality requires that people act to maximise their utility-income, or more precisely their expected utility, a rational elector will perceive that the chance of his own vote making a crucial difference to the policies adopted, and so to his utility-income, is so small that voting would rarely be worth the effort. A fortiori it would be practically irrational for him to take much trouble to inform himself on the issues of the election, canvass for the parties, and so on. Downs is content with the conclusion that the level of political activism in a democracy would be generally low, for that accords with practical experience, and the theory is designed in part to account for this, and explain the system's continuous operation in spite of it. But if voting itself turns out to be an irrational act, the theory has clearly gone much too
far, for a democracy of rational choosers could then never survive. So Downs has a supplementary hypothesis to supply the motivation that the model seems to lack: living in a democracy being itself part of the utility-income of many voters, they will recognise this as an additional benefit, outweighing the short-term cost of voting, and making the effort worthwhile after all.

Downs's saving hypothesis will not do, at least in this rather crude form. For the abstentionist consequences follow not from any selfishness, whether long- or short-term, but from a much more far-reaching consequence of the rationality postulates employed. The maintenance of democratic institutions would be, on Downs's account, what Olson calls a collective good (a public park is another example), a good which cannot feasibly be withheld from any individual in the group if it is supplied to any other. Consequently, unless the group is very small, there is only a tiny chance that the contribution of the single individual X to the cost of providing the good would make all the difference between the good's being provided and not being provided. So for any particular elector, to participate in politics would be a waste of effort, whether there were enough irrational citizens to keep the benefits of democratic government flowing to him, or whether there were not. The chance that his effort would make a crucial difference is microscopic. Even a thorough-going altruist would do better to devote his time to good works, rather than to politics. And the same argument will apply to participation in any mass political or industrial action, unless there are selective incentives offered to members individually on condition that they help to bear the costs. (Australian democracy, with its penalties for not voting, may thus survive where others fail.)

The hypotheses proposed by Downs and Olson are relatively strong and open to falsification, precisely because their requirements for rational action are not so weak as to be consistent with any intentional action whatsoever. Though the concept of 'selfishness' or 'self-
interest' may be looser than one would wish, rational action is specifically said by both authors to exclude any acts save those done for the expected advantage of the individual himself, or of those in whom he has a particular interest, and, more particularly, to exclude any done solely with reference to some intrinsic valued property of the act itself. By contrast, a recent work by W. H. Riker and P. C. Ordeshook adopts far weaker requirements, extending the range of conditions that could count as costs and benefits to include any consideration whatsoever that someone could have as his reason for action. In this way the act of voting is rationally accounted for, despite the low expected utility of the consequent policy outcomes, by adding to its utility 'the satisfaction of complying with the ethic of voting', that of 'affirming allegiance to the political system', 'affirming one's partisan preference', and so on. The only substantive restriction on rational action is that any expected benefit that can count to offset the costs must be stateable in terms of satisfactions resulting from acting, rather than from something inherent in the act itself. But this amounts not to an explanatory hypothesis, but to a methodological prescription or procedural requirement that every consideration claimed as affecting a decision must be expressed in terms of a calculus of utilities and probabilities. The explanatory force of the theory is reduced to the research recipe: if the net costs seem too heavy to make an act plausible that has nonetheless been done, find some compensatory benefit to account for it; conversely, if the expected net benefits should have been large enough to excite action that nevertheless did not take place, look for some countervailing costs.

Riker and Ordeshook aim to provide a single explanatory and predictive schema, to be expressed formally in symbolic functions, into which all the intentional considerations affecting political action can be fed, and from which determinate predictions and retrodictions can then be derived. Unhappily, we are not told how to assign determinate and commensurable
values to the variables, and without that, the equations are empty. If the voter’s actually going to vote is both explicandum and the only available evidence that the satisfaction of affirming his allegiance to the political system exceeds his dissatisfaction in getting wet on his way to the poll, no progress will have been made towards a genuinely explanatory hypothesis, despite all the formulae.⁹

A disadvantage of such theories is that, by lumping together as satisfactions all the considerations that someone might entertain as reasons for action, they obscure the distinction between acting for the sake of some expected advantage to which the action is believed to be a means, and acting for the sake of a principle or from duty — between what Max Weber called Zweckrationalität and Wertrationalität.¹⁰ The point of a zweckrational action — that for the sake of which it is done — lies in the value attached to some consequence of doing it (which may, of course, be a state of mind subsequent to the act); the point of a wertrational act, if not immediately evident, can be explained only by exhibiting it as an instance of some principle or ideal of conduct. In that sense, it is true, something done for its own sake may be done for the sake of something else: but it would be a caricature to say that it is done for the sake of the satisfaction of having done it. For there would often be no satisfaction either in doing or in having done it had the agent no prior belief that it was worth doing apart from the satisfaction. But leaving aside the psychological and moral importance of Weber’s distinction, one would expect that, since both styles of political behaviour can doubtless be found, something useful could be discovered about the differences between systems that foster and accommodate them in different degrees. So one might reasonably doubt the heuristic value of a model that deliberately obscured the distinction, making the taxonomy necessary for such inquiry difficult to formulate.
In Chapter Six of *Democracy and Illusion*, John Plamenatz makes a number of points against what he calls 'neo-utilitarian theories of democracy'. Among them is the criticism that these theorists pay very little attention to the so-called 'ultimate ends' such as the satisfaction of wants, to which they point to explain or justify the practices or principles that interest them. Plamenatz makes a distinction between a person’s private ends and those which he has as an official in an organisation. He questions the value of an interpretation of action couched wholly in terms of private ends, taking no account of the way in which a person’s ends are shaped by his social roles.

Though everyone [he says] has both personal and social aims, the theorist who wants to explain social rules and practices as means to satisfying wants or achieving goals seems always to have personal aims in mind . . . And yet . . . people not only have both social and personal aims; they also quite often choose between them, sometimes preferring social to personal aims, and sometimes the other way about. (p. 165)

For Downs’s ‘self-interest axiom’ Plamenatz suggests substituting a ‘minding one’s own business axiom’,

that men do often set greater store by their private aims (which may or may not be egoistic) than by the official aims of the organizations or communities they belong to, when the two kinds of aim conflict, except when they are themselves acting in an official capacity. (p. 157)

There is at least an inkling of this in Downs. For though he never expressly distinguishes what I have called ‘role-rationality’ — acting to optimise in terms of aims appropriate to one’s role — this does seem to be one component of his ‘political rationality’. His difficulties arise from his failure to show how acting in this way could ever be a rational agent’s preferred course, given that the expected utility of promoting private, family, or business
interests would generally be greater and require a different course.

Revising Downs in the light of Plamenatz, we might develop a social action schema along the following lines. Everyone has not one but a multiplicity of first-order rankings. One of these ranks his plain likes and dislikes — his preference for apples rather than oranges or for being at liberty rather than in gaol. This I shall call his personal preference ranking. But besides this one, there is a ranking of states corresponding to each of the roles he acknowledges as his own; and this ranking too is his. For instance, if he believes that some particular kind of schooling would benefit his children more than any ordinarily available, he may as a parent prefer a situation in which they get it to one in which all children have equal opportunities. But as a citizen, or even more perhaps as Minister of Education, he may reverse this ordering. So though he sends his children to a favoured private school, he votes for a party with egalitarian educational policies, and as Minister initiates policies penalising private schools. This may not mean that his preferences are shifting or unstable — a condition excluded by the standard rational decision models. On the contrary, his seemingly discordant preferences may be asserted quite consistently over years. It is rather that in situations of different types he acts in different roles; and each role has its own appropriate preference ranking.

A person may be said to have rational or consistent preferences, even though he acts sometimes in accordance with a role-ranking A to procure \( a \) rather than \( b \), sometimes in accordance with role-ranking B to procure \( b \) rather than \( a \), providing there is some second-order ranking of roles such that he can be said consistently to prefer under conditions \( p \) to act in accordance with his role A rather than B, and under \( q \) in accordance with B rather than A.\(^{12}\) If this second-order ranking satisfies the formal rationality condition of completeness, it would amount to a total way of life, a
principle or a complex but coherent set of principles, determining for each kind of choice situation the priority (or preference-ranking) to be given to the various roles in which the individual figures in that situation. Such second-order rankings could be treated, perhaps, as setting out cues, switching the individual from one socially-defined role to another, as different social situations confront him. If regularities could be established to account for such role-recognition structures, the socially-defined requirements of different roles might still figure as preference orderings, in a decision-theory model capable in principle of accounting for social phenomena like those of democratic politics.

But such an account of role-performances might be much too rigid, leaving too little room for individual rationality in the acknowledgment and interpretation of roles. We cannot assume, for instance, that someone necessarily acknowledges all the social roles that society at large assigns to him. If he can get away with it, a conscript soldier may refuse to act on the ranking of options socially appropriate to that role; that is to say, in his way of life (his ranking of his role-rankings), fulfilling his military duties ranks high only when that is a necessary means of avoiding outcomes, like detention, low on his personal preference ranking. So his military role-ranking figures in his total preference scheme not as an independent first-order ranking that could on occasion take precedence over his personal preferences, cued in at appropriate points by his second-order ranking; instead, it appears only instrumentally, as a means of optimising in terms of his personal preferences. Indeed, there may be some other role-ranking which dominates his personal ranking and on that account dominates too the subordinate preference for doing his military duty. Membership of a subversive political party might be a role of this kind.

Just as a person need not acknowledge all the roles society assigns to him, so his role-rankings, even in respect of roles he does acknowledge, need not be strictly what
others expect of someone in that role. We may disapprove of someone's decisions in the exercise of a role not only because we have different factual beliefs from his about the probable outcomes, but also because we differ in the ranking of ends that we deem appropriate to someone bearing that role; for instance, we may disagree about the propriety of a university teacher's propagating some ideological view in his courses, while agreeing that he may properly do so in a public meeting. Such differences arise commonly from disagreements about the point of an institution.

The heuristic attraction of role-theory in social science lies in the promise that it will dispense with the need to investigate the motivations of individuals, once the roles constituted by a social system and the bearers of those roles have been identified. But if the plain decision-theory model, sketched in this section, turned out to require very extensive modification to accommodate vagaries of individual selection and interpretation of roles, this advantage would disappear unless some equivalent regularities in the assumption of second-order rankings could be established. A theory like Downs's does seem to have to recognise that political choices may sometimes reflect personal preferences and sometimes role-preferences other than political ones. It certainly needs some hypothesis about the kind of second-order ranking that would explain why a number of electors sufficient to keep the system going should choose to act in accordance with their civic role on polling day despite the minuscule probability for any particular individual that his contribution would be decisive. But, at the same time, it has to account for the reluctance of more than a relative handful to become more deeply involved, even though the abstainers might recognise that their civic role requires it of them. On reflection, this may not be so difficult after all. Leaving aside a person's personal preferences, for staying home on a rainy night and so on, he has other calls on time and energy arising from his other roles in the social groupings and activities in which
he is caught up, whether as family man or darts player. Voting, of course, is a ritual act with strong symbolic significance; so his ranking of role-rankings may assign to the performance of his civic role on polling day a high priority over other preferences, whether private or role-dependent. But the sustained interest, inquiry, and activity traditionally thought necessary to give point to voting is likely to be far more costly in terms of his other ends. If the probability of a policy payoff from political participation is very low, a second-order principle would have to rank acting in one’s civic role very highly indeed, if these more exacting and everyday performances are preferred to the competing demands of other more immediate roles, let alone to personal enjoyments. Unless, of course, one just enjoys politics.

The Downsian kind of theory is meant to explain democratic institutions using the standard formal conditions of rational choice, supplemented by only a few general substantive conditions. But to account for the actual social mix of electoral participation and apathy, more elaborate substantive conditions may be needed. It may depend on the distribution in a society of different substantive second-order preference rankings, which only particular descriptions of socialisation and culture patterns could explain. The more diverse the preference rankings in terms of which rational agents optimise, the less illuminating the decision-theory models become.

But that, of course, does not close discussion of the rationality of participation: it simply casts doubt on the adequacy of the standard rational decision-theory model to capture all the reasons that there might be for participating.

IV

People who favour general participation in politics often claim that political cultures that provide plenty of opportunities for participation at low political levels foster ways of life that rank participation highly at all levels. For even though the issues at low levels commonly
seem less weighty, the chances of one’s intervention being effective are much higher than in national politics; so one’s belief in the importance of politics, cultivated by the more encouraging experience, spills over into the area where the payoffs of individual action are far less evident. Supposing this to be true, the motivation lacking in the Downs-Olson model would be supplied by the socialisation patterns engendered by the system itself. This is rather like saying that the market economy works (so far as it does) because socialisation into it involves coming to value making profits, maximising one’s income, and so on; thus it provides the motivation necessary to keep it going. Still, there are many critics of the market economy — among them participationists — who would claim that this is an instance of a formally rational system sustaining itself only by perpetuating the irrational or alienated attitudes or goals necessary to it. Is there any reason for seeing the participationists’ own claim differently? What reason can there be for favouring social arrangements that tend to produce people who care about acting in their political roles? Is there any reason to prefer, among all the possible rankings of role-preferences, some member of the sub-set that rates political participation highly? And would such a reason necessarily presuppose a third-order ranking, itself only one of a set, preferred in the light of a fourth, and so on in an infinite regression? Or could something else count as a reason for the participationist preference?

Participationists’ reasons generally fall into two broad classes, one instrumental, the other educational or developmental. The form of the first type is that other values, such as justice, freedom, the interests or the rights of the governed, will be protected or promoted only if citizens are vigilant and active. But while this is an argument for valuing the cultivation of participationist preferences in others, it is not an argument for having them for oneself. Unless there is some intrinsic payoff like comradeship to be had, why not benefit from having second-order preference rankings different from those of
most other people, so that one can get on with the things
one simply likes doing and does well, or attend to the
demands of other roles where action may have a more
immediate point?

The second kind of reason is that people participating
in collective decision-making develop certain morally
desirable properties, notably a sense of responsibility both
for themselves and for others. Whether or not this is true,
it would still have to be shown that a disposition to
participate was either a causally or a logically necessary
condition for being a morally responsible person. Certainly, one might legitimately doubt whether a person
was morally responsible in the required sense if he refused
to do his share when that put extra burdens on other
people or significantly weakened the collective effort. But
failure to join in mass politics is clearly not such a case.
Consider someone who is already mature and responsible,
who does not shirk in small group politics, where shirking
would clearly matter, but who has no special skills that
might give him unusual influence in national politics;
what reason has he for continuing to be active as a
member of the rank and file? Perhaps, like Candide, the
rational man would learn from his youthful experience of
political action the wisdom of cultivating his garden, and
like Candide's author retire to his Ferney to do humble
good works among his neighbours.

Participation in national politics can be rational, then,
for anyone who simply enjoys it, or who sets great store by
fulfilling his political role. Someone else who cares about
certain values like freedom and justice may have a
reason, given certain empirical assumptions, for
favouring conditions tending to generate such
preferences in others. But would he be irrational or in
some other respect defective if, having other interests of
his own, he put them very much before the performance
of his own responsibilities as a citizen?
There is something distasteful in the picture of the man who sits comfortably at home applauding the readiness of others to bear the heat and burden of the day, recognising how necessary they are, and how fortunate he is that so many of his fellow citizens are more politically inclined than he is. One feels his attitude to be pusillanimous in part no doubt because one accepts the implied paradigm of epic and dangerous struggles against injustice. Someone taking a more indulgent and less dramatic view of politics, who described it, perhaps, as ‘attending to the general arrangements of a set of people’ or who, like the pluralist political scientists of a few years back, viewed the political scene as a field of manoeuvre in which competing interests arrived at more or less reasonable accommodations by consent, would be less censorious towards the bystander. There are political battles to be fought, and it is as well that there are those ready to fight them; but there are other important things to be done too, and it would not do (some would say) if we all neglected them for the sake of politics.

Suppose, however, one is less complacent; suppose one is very conscious of injustice and oppression all around; can one still claim that because anything one did oneself to put it right would make little difference, there can be no reason for voting, joining protest demonstrations, writing letters to the press, contributing funds or whatever, unless one happens to care for that sort of thing? My intuitive response to such a claim is to reject it, to say that for any morally responsible person there can be a reason, under some conditions at least, for caring for that sort of thing whether it ranks high among his personal preferences or not. But I confess that I find no form of utilitarian argument that would adequately support this. I am inclined to think, however, that there may be a kind of action the rationality of which, having to do with consistency conditions for having attitudes and expressing them, is not easily captured by utilitarian or
preferential-optimisation models. A good deal of political activity that may properly be called unprofitable by a utilitarian may be rational enough in this sense. Imagine that the participationist's educational process has achieved Mill's aim of making someone a morally responsible person. Though politics ranks low among his personal preferences, he does care a great deal about freedom and justice and the rights and welfare of others. I cannot go into the question whether having such attitudes can be rational, or whether rationality can be attributed to attitudes at all except in a relational way. I must limit myself to asking whether, having the attitudes he does, he can be rationally committed by that alone to participate in politics even, say, for the sake of a lost cause.

Now the notion of a morally responsible person is not as clear as one would like. The following characterisation seems to me, however, not particularly eccentric. In the first place, he is someone with a conception of himself as agent rather than process, as a subject with a capacity not only for making a difference to the way the world goes, but for choosing for reasons that it should go this way rather than that. He is conscious, that is, that it matters which course he chooses. Such a person will have — and know he has — enterprises which he will judge successes or failures by certain standards. He will learn to assess not only his enterprises but also himself as their author. Indeed, he will be inclined to think of himself as a success or a failure as a person to the extent that he respects his own enterprises and achievements, appraising them by standards he acknowledges as his own.

Of course, the kinds of enterprises he cares about, and the standards by which he makes his assessments, will be in large measure the products of a socialisation process. But as a rational chooser, he has the capacity to examine these standards critically, to test them for coherence with one another and with his experience, and by various analogical, extrapolatory, or re-combinatory operations to extend the range of his sympathies and of his creative
enterprises. In such ways he makes of himself a person of some particular kind, defined by the things he cares about. And he can be held responsible for what he is. For to the extent that he actually goes through the developmental process I have described, he is his own author, the object of an overarching enterprise, the making of himself. And he will have certain beliefs about what he is that will entitle him to expect certain kinds of action from himself in appropriate situations. Given the structure of attitudes that he identifies as his own personality, there will be some things such that to contemplate them with indifference would be to give the lie to what he believes himself to be, and to have made. To be indifferent would not be true to his nature, as we say.

My characterisation of the morally responsible person has been pretty formal, concerned principally with the categorial framework of his self-perception. But I have attributed to him, too, certain substantive attitudes — concerns for justice, freedom, and the rights of others. Now there can be injustice and oppression around the parish pump, no less than in Whitehall and Westminster. Where the collective decision-making process is virtually face-to-face, an individual's intervention may well be decisive, so that these high-order concerns can generate instrumental reasons for participating in that process. But can they provide reasons for involvement in national politics?

Now there may be fortunate times and places in which deep indignation is not excited by political issues, when a person need find in them no challenge to his good faith. At such times one would not expect every morally responsible person's way of life to assign a high ranking position to his role as citizen. It may well be open to someone whose natural inclinations are non-political, even for someone who, as I have postulated, cares deeply for justice and freedom, but who finds plenty that is worth-while doing in his other activities, to take the detached view I attributed earlier to the political
pluralist. But repression, cruelty, and injustice can exist on a greater scale perhaps in the field of national politics than in any other area of human activity; and when they do, a person who makes the claim to himself that he cannot condone them surely has reason enough for demonstrating where he stands. For what would it mean to care deeply for freedom and justice if one did not express one’s concern in any of the standard ways on those occasions when its objects were abused? To remain passive and silent then would seem inconsistent with being the sort of moral agent one claims to be, with the moral concerns one claims to have. For political activity is the standard way in which concerns of this sort are expressed. Short of some very powerful countervailing concern, one could not be a morally responsible person in the sense I have outlined, with a concern for the principal moral ideas, yet select for oneself a way of life that assigned a low ranking to one’s political roles even in conditions such as these.

I am suggesting, in short, that political activity may be a form of moral self-expression, necessary not for achieving any objective beyond itself (for the cause may be lost), nor yet for the satisfaction of knowing that one had let everyone else know that one was on the side of the right, but because one could not seriously claim, even to oneself, to be on that side without expressing the attitude by the action most appropriate to it in the paradigm situation.

Someone will ask, no doubt, why the expression must be in one of the standard ways. If it makes no appreciable difference to the outcomes how or whether a given individual expresses his attitudes, why should he not choose some private or less exacting mode of expression, like singing political songs in the bath, or some mode that he chooses quite at random to count as expressing his attitude — slowing down, say, as he drives past the Post Office?

Now it may well be that attitudes closely linked to emotions, such as anger, can express themselves in a
variety of ways, some highly idiosyncratic, like grimacing or cracking one's knuckles. But principled attitudes seem not to be like that. The smaller the possibility that the relevant states of affairs will be significantly altered by the individual's decision, the more strictly the expressive act must conform to some socially understood pattern for expressing that attitude.\(^\text{16}\) Blowing up a tailor's shop\(^\text{17}\) can be an act of political participation when it is part of a concerted terrorist strategy, each incident of which can reasonably be expected to make a significant contribution to the outcome. But an isolated explosion would be no more an act of political participation than would a mugging in the park. To be understood as political a participatory act must either be calculated to effect a political outcome, such as a change of policy, or it must be more or less ritualistic, an act conventionally understood to betoken a concern for some principle or ideal characteristically and importantly at issue in governmental decision-making. There is no property of an act as such that is either necessary or sufficient to characterise it political. Sitting down at a bar and tooting a Morse V have both counted as political at different times. But in all such cases the act is symbolic and ritualistic in its context, where no actual change can be brought about by doing it. Still, the necessity that obliges the man of political principle to adopt such expressive modes is not that he wants others to understand the nature of his protest (though he very likely will want that too). In a highly efficient police state he may know that his dissident vote will be known to scarcely anyone, and even if he breaks the windows of the Ministry they will be repaired before daylight. It is rather that only by using such standard modes can the protester claim, even to himself, to have made his protest, to have expressed his attitude, and so to have been true to himself.

It is no accident, of course, that an attitude like a concern for freedom, justice, or respect for rights should be most aptly expressed by acts in the political mode. For the rule utilitarian answer to this kind of problem is right.
thus far: if all the people who felt deeply about an ideal expressed their attitude in the standard ways, the ideal would have a better chance of being realised than if they sang songs in the bath about it. So if freedom and justice are important, there is a reason for approving of our mode of conceptualisation, of our making a conceptual connection between having such attitudes and expressing them in political ways. This is to see in our making this connection a kind of functional rationality, akin to the functional rationality of voting that I referred to earlier — the rationality of a practice necessary to the survival of the approved system, but instrumentally irrational for each voter in particular, since his action is hardly ever indispensable. In the same way it may be claimed that participationist attitudes are functionally rational for a just and free society; a demiurge contriving such a society would have fixed us up with such a set of concepts. But that is quite different from saying either that it is the utility of the individual's participatory act as promoting freedom and justice that makes it rational — for it does so only to a microscopic degree; or that it is the utility of the rule that people fulfil their civic responsibilities that provides the individual with a reason for conforming to it — for his own conforming will have little to do with the efficacy of the rule. His only good reason for action may be that he is committed to participation by his claim to care about the principle which is its telos.

NOTES

1 S. I. Benn and G. W. Mortimore (eds.), *Rationality and the Social Sciences*, London, 1976, and, in particular, my Chap. 10, 'Rationality and political behaviour'.


3 Ibid., p. 20.


7 In 'Rationality and political behaviour', loc. cit., I have examined the Downs-Olson method in political science in rather more detail.


9 For a more extensive critique of the theoretical model proposed by Riker and Ordeshook, see my paper 'Rationality and political behaviour' cited above.

10 See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittlich, New York, 1968, pp. 22-6. Whether Weber meant precisely what I mean by Wertrationalität is open to argument. But since my purpose is theory analysis, not exegesis, it is not important for this essay.


12 See Stephan Körner, 'On the coherence of factual beliefs and practical attitudes', *Amer. Phil. Q.*, Vol. 9, 1972, pp. 1-17, for a discussion of the coherence of preference orderings, which, though not associating attitudes with roles, goes far more deeply and more carefully than I have here into the relations of attitudes of different levels. See also Chap. 7 of the same author's *Experience and Conduct*, Cambridge, 1976.


14 Michael Oakeshott's phrase; see his 'Political education' in his *Rationalism in Politics*, London, 1962, p. 112.


16 I arrived at the formulation of this paragraph only after a fruitful discussion of these points with Mr W. L. Weinstein, whose helpful criticism and suggestions I gratefully acknowledge.

17 Gieves, a fashionable tailoring establishment in Mayfair, was bombed by Irish terrorists in 1975. Other bombings, mainly of restaurants in the same district, followed in rapid succession. A cumulative effect was clearly hoped for, and the selection of resorts of wealthy and supposedly influential people was evidently part of the strategy.
Comment
Richard Wollheim

One way of describing Professor Benn’s paper — though not one that he employs — would be to say that in it he offers us a sketch towards a theory of political participation in a democratic society.

Since I have introduced the phrase ‘theory of political participation’ I must explain what I mean by it. A theory of political participation would set itself two aims: in the first place, to give an account of the participatory behaviour of the democratic citizen, and, secondly, to ‘rationalise’ — as we have learnt to say — such behaviour, i.e. to exhibit its rationality in so far as it is rational.

Now it follows that if the theory is to fulfil both these aims — the second as well as the first — the account of the citizen’s behaviour must pick up, or capture, on the one hand, the schemata and conceptualisations, on the other hand, the patterns of argument, which conjointly determine or regulate that behaviour. The account, that is, must be not just observationally adequate, it must be descriptively adequate. For if the account does not capture the internal determinants of participatory behaviour, it is obscure to me how it could serve as a base for rationalising that behaviour. In ignorance of the internal determinants we might be in a position to say that the behaviour could be, or is possibly, rational, but I do not see how we would be able to say that it is rational. And yet it is just this that is asked of a theory of political participation.

I start with this very general point because in the light
of it what might otherwise be merely surface difficulties in the understanding of Benn’s paper look rather more important to resolve. These difficulties initially appear simply as difficulties in seeing how the two parts of Benn’s paper — the critical and the speculative — fit together: or, more specifically, how much of the first part survives into the second.

Let me spell this out: In reconstructing the account of participatory behaviour inspired by the decision-theory model, Benn suggests that we must, in the interests of realism if nothing else, supplement it with what he calls a ‘social action schema’. This schema, which we assign to every individual to whom the account applies, is essentially two-tiered. On the lower tier we find a multiplicity of first-order preference rankings. One such ranking is that based on the individual’s likes and dislikes and is called his personal preference ranking. The other first-order rankings are, or are largely, rankings associated with the different roles that the individual is disposed to assume within the society. Included amongst these will be the ranking associated with the political role, which is called the political preference ranking. The upper tier of the social action schema is occupied by a second-order preference ranking which orders the various first-order rankings. Now, the second-order ranking will order the first-order rankings in much the same way as the first-order rankings order the options that turn up in them. That is to say, it will order them not unconditionally, but conditionally. The second-order ranking will lead the individual to adopt, say, his personal ranking under conditions C₁, or the ranking associated with role R under conditions C₂, and so on. Now each individual includes in his social action schema only one second-order ranking but this ranking is selected out of the class of such rankings, and a significant subclass of this class contains what are called participationist second-order preference rankings. And an identifying feature of participationist rankings is that they lead the individual to adopt the first-order ranking associated with
the political role whenever the naive theorist of democracy would indeed think that the individual citizen should engage in participatory behaviour.

So much for the social action schema itself, and the account of participatory behaviour that it generates.

Now if this account is to fit into a theory that rationalises such behaviour and does so within the resources of decision-theory, the task is obviously to justify, within the resources of decision-theory, a participationist second-order preference ranking. Benn seems to think that this cannot be done, and it is at this point that we move from the first half of the paper to the second half, from the critical to the speculative. And I call the second half speculative because in it Benn attempts in his own way to rationalise participatory behaviour. What is characteristic of his attempt is that participatory behaviour is rationalised by being exhibited as the natural expression of a commitment to certain substantive values. And to say that participatory behaviour is the natural expression of such a commitment is taken by Benn to mean two things, both of which he holds to be true: first, that if one is committed to these values, then in the relevant conditions it is natural to express this commitment; and, secondly, if one expresses this commitment, then it is necessary to do so in participatory behaviour.

But the question that I have for Benn is this: What kind of account of participatory behaviour does this proposed rationalisation use as its base? More specifically: does his account, like the account he rejects or like the reconstructed account that he rejects, assign to the individual a social action schema of the kind I have just been expounding? Or, as we move from the first part of the paper to the second, does he, and therefore can we, junk this?

It should be apparent — though I will spell this out — that this question has for me a twofold significance. An answer to this question is necessary if we are to understand Benn’s theory of participatory behaviour.
And it is also necessary if we are to assess Benn’s account of participatory behaviour. And I distinguish, you will recall, an account from a theory of participatory behaviour, in that the theory goes on to rationalise the participatory behaviour as this has — that is, in the terms in which this has — been laid out in the account. If, therefore, I am to understand Benn’s theory of participatory behaviour, that is understand how it rationalises such behaviour, I need to know what element in the behaviour the justification latches on to — more specifically, does it latch on to, or on to some part of, a social action schema? Or does it latch on to the participatory behaviour directly? And, again, if I am to assess Benn’s account of participatory behaviour, I need to know what internal determinants it assigns to the individual citizen — more specifically, does it, like the account it supplants, assign to him a social action schema?

I ask these questions in good faith. I ask them, that is, because I do not know the answers to them.

But, of course, there is more to it than just that, and let me spend the last few moments on what this might be.

For, if Benn tells me that he does wish his account of participatory behaviour to include in it reference to a social action schema — where this is something that is actually ascribed to the individual and figures among the internal determinants of that behaviour — then I would feel uncertain about his account. I would feel uncertain whether his account could lay claim to descriptive adequacy. And this is so because I am sceptical whether the relevant part of the social action schema — that is to say, a participationist second-order ranking plus a first-order political preference ranking with the two so related that the former in the appropriate conditions leads the individual to adopt the latter — is the right kind of structure to determine participatory behaviour.

For an essential part of this structure is that there is a distinct first-order preference ranking associated with the political role. But I do not see what reason we have to
believe in the existence of such a thing. I do not see why we should believe that there is a form of role-rationality (as Benn calls it) that is specifically associated with the political role and which could then order the various options in a way that satisfies the formal requirements of transitivity and connectedness — let alone in a way that meets the non-formal requirements of being politically reasonable.

Let me try to give two regrettably ill-worked out considerations that lead me to this view. In doing so I shall contrast the political role with the military role or the role of the soldier to which I think a specific form of role-rationality does associate itself.

The first consideration touches on 'abstentionism'. Now, of course, it is true that someone may be an abstentionist because he does not think of himself as a citizen, or, if he does, this thought about himself is quite inoperative. But I doubt if this is the interesting case of abstentionism. The interesting case, surely, is that of the abstentionist who thinks of himself as a citizen but who thinks that it is a waste of time for citizens — or perhaps for citizens like himself who have better things to do — to get mixed up in democratic politics. Now the notion of rationality is not all that precise — incidentally something to which to my mind Benn pays insufficient attention — but I would need a lot of persuasion to think that the proper criticism to make of an abstentionist of this sort is that he falls short of rationality: though I would readily think that this is the proper criticism to make of the man who is and thinks of himself as a soldier and yet thinks that he is fully justified in running away before the field is lost.

The second consideration again touches on the abstentionist and our criticism of him, but this time not so much on the grounds of our criticism as on its scope. For if we do criticise the abstentionist for his abstentionism, we do not criticise him as a citizen. We criticise him, if you like, as a man, or we criticise him tout court. But once again if you turn to the soldier, then it is
surely the case that, if we criticise him for running away, we criticise him as a soldier. We might also criticise him as a man, but then we might also praise him as a man, and, likelier than either, we might just sympathise with him as a man. And the bearing of all this on the issue to hand is that if we criticise the abstentionist as a man not as a citizen, let alone as an ‘irrational’ citizen, we cannot in our criticism be invoking the role-rationality intrinsic to the political role: and yet, if there were such a thing, surely this is just where it would register.

Scepticism about role-rationality specific to the political role goes hand in hand with scepticism about a preference ranking associated with the political role. And perhaps the most succinct way of expressing my reservations on this latter score would be this: that I can see that when the individual reviews the role of the citizen and what this involves, he is quite likely to be led by this process to an inventory of options, to a list of the kinds of thing that as a citizen he might have to consider doing or refraining from doing or refusing to do; but what I cannot see is that this process would lead him beyond this and that he would get out of this review a principle of ordering these options and moreover ordering them in a way that satisfies the formal requirements already listed.

However, as I see it — and may I remind you that I think of myself not as criticising Benn but as putting a question to him — all that I have been saying, all this scepticism about the role-rationality and the preference ranking allegedly connected with the political role, fits in very well with Benn’s own view about how participatory behaviour is rationalised. For, in his view, it is rationalised, not by reference to political roles or to political ends, but by appeal to a commitment to certain values in that such behaviour is best seen as a natural expression of this commitment. And, though these values are commonly called ‘political values’, the phrase needs understanding. For they are values to which a man is committed and they happen to relate to politics: they are not values to which a man is committed only in so far as
he happens to relate to politics. If Benn invokes the citizen's commitment to certain values in order to justify participatory behaviour, it is significant that we do not have to invoke the political role in order to justify the citizen's commitment to these values.

My suggestion, therefore, would be that Benn's attempt to rationalise participatory behaviour presumes that we abandon the account of such behaviour on which it is determined by, or determined by the relevant part of, a social action schema; although we could, of course, abandon this account of participatory behaviour without having to think that such behaviour is rationalised in the way in which Benn proposes that it is — interesting though this proposal is.
I am unsure what to say about Mr Benn's paper, both because I am unclear about what I wish to say about the whole subject of political participation, and because I am unclear about the nature of Benn's contribution to the topic. As he knows, I agree with at least some of the conclusions to which he comes — in particular, that our task is to give some account of what it is to choose to be a rational, political animal, and that some elements of that account will have to concentrate on the opportunities for self-expression afforded by politics, rather than on its purely instrumental aspects; I share his interest in, and his anxieties about, the economic models of political activity offered by Downs and Olson. I therefore felt, when reading his paper, that I was to a considerable extent watching myself think. I hope that this degree of sympathy, or empathy, will do something to explain, if little to excuse, the extreme scrappiness of what follows.

There are two dismissive responses which Benn's paper invites. The first is to say that it simply fails to touch the problem he sets himself, the second to say that there is no such problem as the one he sets himself. That is, anyone who was committed, for whatever reason, to the view that a rational individual votes only to maximise returns to himself — that he chooses whether or not to vote at all, and if to vote, then which party to vote for on instrumental grounds, looking to his flow of utilities — such a reader must feel that Benn does nothing to solve the problem of providing a reason for such a voter to turn
out and vote. Indeed, Benn seems to follow other writers, such as Olson and Barry,\(^1\) in declaring it insoluble. Conversely, someone who thought that it was manifestly the case that people do not decide to vote on utility-maximising grounds might think that Benn is unduly squeamish about simply ignoring the Downsian dilemma. Certainly, he might say, people do not vote to maximise their flow of utilities — save in the dreary sense that after we have explained why people do vote, the theorist of utility-maximisation can come along and rewrite our explanation in his own strange dialect — but what we want from Benn is not that observation, but an account of the rationalist ethics which underpins his own account of ‘role-rationality’. (I ought, perhaps, to say that I do not deny that there might be something to be gained from a ‘praxiological’ analysis of rationally defensible moral action, only that we can do much for a theory like Downs’s by the sort of expedient which Benn treats so harshly and so justly.) In particular, what we want from Benn is an account of how acting in a particular kind of recognised social role is rational in some substantial, but non-instrumental, sense.

I put these two extreme views so simply because I am tempted by both of them. The first view is tempting for two reasons. Firstly, it is as a matter of fact true that most people in countries such as Britain do vote for the political party which is most likely to promote the interests of people like themselves. It may be that middle-class Labour voters are an exception, but working-class Conservatives surely are not — they have a different theory from their Labour voting peers concerning the payoffs from different economic regimes.\(^2\) If party choice is dictated by self-interest, it would be strange if the decision whether to vote was not. Secondly, where forms of political activity other than merely voting are at issue, the success and failure of organisations do conform to the explanations offered by Mancur Olson.\(^3\) ‘Selective incentives’ and the like seem decisive; local Conservative parties, for example, usually have more individual
members than local Labour parties, and the reason is widely held to lie in the social facilities offered to members of Conservative associations.

Now, the fact that some behaviour is accounted for in these terms might inspire us to see what can be done about the voting paradox. Benn's statement of the problem is compelling enough; anyone who aims to maximise \( p(v)^4 \) will find that the probability of his vote being decisive, either in securing the implementation of the policies he wishes to see followed or in saving the political system from collapse, is so low that he is better off staying at home, if his own interest is in question. There are several points one might make. The preliminary point is that it is no accident that our doubts about the rationality of voting are doubts in both the explanatory and the justificatory dimension — if men are rational, then why do they vote, and if we think they should behave rationally, then ought they to vote? It is not very difficult to explain why men vote against the seeming dictates of \( p(v) \). People in all sorts of circumstances are found to overestimate the odds in favour of large returns, both good and bad. A man betting on a football pool tends both to regard the stake — when it is a small one — as below the threshold where its loss makes any difference, so that its loss is treated as on par with losing ten pence in the street; and he similarly tends to overestimate the chance that he will get the jackpot. And where a large loss is in prospect, such as institutional collapse, people tend to over-insure; you will not find people willing to bet their entire salary on less than a certainty. But all this evades one of the crucial assumptions, which is that estimates of \( p(v) \) are supposed by writers like Downs to be accurate ones, and the explanation above consists in showing how they are not. But we might remain within the assumption and still get the answer we need, if we introduce political parties into the case. The citizen who, during an election, wants to watch his television in peace, will find himself unable to do so; canvassers will badger him to vote; they will offer
him a comfortable ride to the polling station; in short, they will make it 'cheaper' to go and vote. During local elections, parties make few canvassing efforts, and the poll is often derisory. The objection to this explanation is a factual one, namely that the most recent research into the subject suggests that the impact of canvassing is a great deal less dramatic than I suggest — it accounts for something like a 7 per cent difference in turn out, rather than the 50 per cent or more which we require. We might do something to refine my second suggestion by appealing to the variety of payoffs available. Thus, we might suppose that we could find leaders, enthusiasts and the mere public; the leaders expect all sorts of benefits from victory, such as school governorships, appointment to the bench, and so on, the enthusiasts are the rare people who like the company of those engaged in political activity and who are therefore not instrumentalists at all; and these two groups between them galvanise the third into voting.

But I incline, in truth, to follow Benn in thinking that no instrumentalist theory will do the trick. To put it crudely, it is not clear to me why, on the assumption of self-interest, we are not all free riders. But, even if men are altruists, it seems that the smallness of the $p(v)$ calculation would suggest that being nice to one's next door neighbour would be a better course than going out to vote; and, if one is the sort of altruistic utilitarian who thinks that his own happiness is one element in the calculation of $v$, it seems likely that altruism, like selfishness, will keep the citizen at home in front of his television. The most plausible account of why people turn out to vote is that they have a sense of duty; the more important the thing which the election determines, the greater their sense of obligation. One element in the utilitarian picture which seems worth keeping is the notion that the average man has a 'threshold' beyond which he starts to question the cost of his social duties; a man who thinks that he is paying his fair share of time and effort will not notice them until they rise to an
unusual level. It seems to me that such a view accounts for the facts as well as anything in Benn’s essay, and justifies more or less the same sorts of behaviour.

Turning very briefly to Benn’s preferred account, I have two small questions. The first is to wonder whether Benn ought not to tell us more about the point of an individual expressing his allegiances in the way he suggests. It is a commonplace that behaviour which is not motivated by instrumental considerations may yet be instrumental in securing both the general interest and the individual’s own interest. The Prussian soldiers who regarded themselves as merely on leave from death did not set out to serve their own interests, but they were on average less likely to suffer high casualties than soldiers less self-abnegating. Now, Benn sees that an instrumental account of voting behaviour will not do, even where it is certainly true that everyone’s voting would be in everyone’s interest. The problem he sets us is to work out what sort of decision scheme the individual employs. To say that he votes in order to be true to himself sounds extremely narcissistic even though Benn is clearly espousing quite the reverse of narcissism. But I am baffled by the task of giving an account of voting which makes it wholly rational and wholly non-instrumental.

The second question is rather different. If we suppose that voting is not so much a matter of using a mechanism to achieve a result as employing an institution to express our allegiances, then, plainly, we have to explore the Wertrationalität of such action. But can we claim that some sorts of behaviour are more rational than others? Can we, that is, suggest that the institution offers opportunities that other institutions do not offer — as we might claim that certain poetic mediums offered openings for the expression of emotions which other modes would not readily permit? And can we do that without expanding the notion of ‘rational’ behaviour absurdly far beyond those limits which it usually connotes in the social sciences?
NOTES
3 Barry, op. cit., pp. 33-6 and Olson, op. cit., p. 61.
4 I.e. to select that course of action which will maximise the sum of the utilities of all its possible outcomes, each discounted, however, by its probability. This is the standard decision-theory criterion for optimal decision-making under conditions of risk.
The usual context in which philosophers interest themselves in the rationality of voting is the well-established bloodsport of utilitarian-baiting. The rules for this, as played by Anglophone moral philosophers, are delightfully simple. 'We all know' that any decent chap would do such-and-such, so the object is to produce hypothetical cases where it may appear that a utilitarian would be bound to come out with the wrong answer. The sport consists in the fact that the utilitarian is faced with either wriggling around to show that he can come up with the right answer or standing revealed as a coarse, morally insensitive fellow, trampling on the delicate intuitions of others with his big muddy boots. Any number can play.

Voting and maybe other forms of mass political action have been seen by anti-utilitarians as promising candidates for use in this sport, and Professor Benn's paper is premised on the assumption that no utilitarian justification for the rationality of voting could be offered. I want to suggest that it is far from clear that voting does present a serious problem for utilitarians, but that if it does (a) it would be easy for utilitarians to adopt institutions to solve the problem and (b) voting, because of the precise mathematical structure of aggregation into which it enters, is a most unusual kind of act and is not therefore the thin end of any large wedge. The anti-utilitarian, having shown to his own satisfaction that voting would be a problem, is not therefore entitled to
wave his hands and say 'that’s just one example picked at random, of course'.

I should like to begin by observing that in the literature — of the decision to vote and of other collective actions — there is a tendency to carry on most of the discussion in terms of one sort of instrumentalism (egoism) and then transfer the results in a rather cursory way to utilitarianism. (Mancur Olson is a good example of this and is followed here by Benn.) But I think this very seriously fails to give utilitarianism a fair shake. It really is true that an egoist would generally prefer to be a free rider. (More exactly, the question is not one of being a free rider. The point is that whether the train goes or does not go, not paying the fare beats paying the fare — unless your paying the fare makes the train go.)

Suppose that in some country there are two political parties, with identical programs (and of whom identical expectations of action are held) except that one proposes to shoot Mr X — an inoffensive and law-abiding citizen — if elected. If Mr X is an egoist, he can only decide whether to vote by guessing how many other people will vote. If everybody else is an egoist, only those who stand to gain jobs from one party rather than another winning have any motive for voting apart from himself, so it will probably be worth his while (as the only person affected by the alternative policies) to vote. But if he expects a lot of people to vote for some reason, so that his chance of changing the result is very low, he would probably do better to spend his time living it up in case the result goes the wrong way.

Now change the scenario in just one respect. Say now that one party is expected with high probability to bring about a nuclear holocaust, killing most of the people in the country and hundreds of millions of others, while the other party is not. An egoist has the same problem of calculation as before — the fact that it is several million people’s lives that are at stake rather than just his does not alter the utility of the alternative outcomes to him since in both cases it is life versus death. If he expects a lot of
people to vote, he won't, but if he expects few to, he will. Obviously if everybody is an egoist it is quite difficult to decide what the relevant probability of others voting is. If we take X's reasoning process, it will go like this: lots of people will vote anyway so I won't vote. But they're all reasoning like me, so they won't. So I should. But they're reasoning like that too . . .

But utilitarians are not, it seems to me, involved in such a problem because to a utilitarian so much is at stake. Even an infinitesimal chance of preventing a nuclear holocaust makes it worth incurring some cost to vote.

This is an artificial case in that there are not normally clear expectations of different outcomes that are universally held. But the point still seems to me to hold that if an act-utilitarian really gives full weight to the consequences for everyone that he expects, this will normally provide an adequate reason for voting. If I think one party will increase the GNP by $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent in five years more than the other party, that for a utilitarian is a big aggregate difference. Are there really so many more beneficial things one could do with fifteen minutes?

In any case, there is absolutely no practical problem for a society of utilitarians — or indeed for that matter egoists. If instrumental considerations won't lead people to vote you take a collective decision to supply special incentives for voting i.e. fines for non-voting or (even simpler) a payment for voting. The officer on duty simply hands each person who comes to vote a postal order for £5, say. I think there is a lot to be said for this in actual societies precisely because the tendency to vote is unevenly spread among those eligible and this skews the results. The inculcation of a sense of the duty to vote or the importance of one party winning rather than the other is, as it were, a collective good for those groups that do it, and I think it ought to be a matter of public policy to level out that collective advantage.

Finally, is the alleged problem of voting for act-
utilitarianism just one example out of a whole mass of possible ones? I don't believe it is.

Obviously the problem is one of thresholds, but voting is peculiar in that because of the precise mathematic structure of aggregation, nearly everything is a threshold. That is to say, unless the result is settled by a margin of one vote (or two votes) each person can say that it would have been the same if he had not taken part. But this is a rare kind of case. With most things, if a lot of X is good (or bad) then less of it is good (or bad) too. A lot of litter is bad but a little bit of litter is bad too. 'Every litter bit hurts', as the slogan put it. An act-utilitarian does not need to doubt that he should not drop litter, even though his one bit of toffee-wrapping is only a small eyesore.

There is I think in such discussions a general tendency to confuse diffusion of effect with no effect. Thus, at a conference which I recently attended, a philosopher argued that there is no way in which a society of act-utilitarians could by individual action follow a path of controlling population growth, even if it were acknowledged that population growth made everyone worse off on the average. The argument was that one birth fewer did not make enough difference, so you must have a collectively enforced policy to have (say) a hundred thousand fewer births. But this seems to me obvious nonsense. If it is a net advantage to the society to have a hundred thousand fewer births then it is advantageous to have one fewer.

Garrett Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' illustrates exactly the same logical structure. In an egoistic society each person with access to the commons will graze an additional beast on it so long as an additional beast continues to yield more to him, even if the point has long been passed at which the total yield of the commons was maximised, so that the additional beast, by intensifying overgrazing, reduces the yield to all the other users more than it increases his own. But it is clear that a utilitarian would not, in these circumstances, graze an extra beast.
on the commons, even if the adverse effect were small and diffuse.

I want now to turn to another question. Why do people actually vote? Considering the volume of voting research that has now accumulated it is curious how scanty our knowledge is. We do of course know for a number of countries the correlates of voting — the characteristic turnout patterns of young, old, male, female, middle class, working class, well-educated, poorly-educated and so on.

However, many social scientists (including myself) do not regard the discovery of such correlates as constituting an explanation of the phenomenon in question — rather we see the correlations themselves as in need of explanation. Some purists insist that we must be able to account for the actor's behaviour in terms that he himself would recognise. Others have a more relaxed attitude and are prepared to accept explanations couched in terms of psychological mechanisms like the tendency to cognitive dissonance reduction or the causal link between frustration and aggression. This is the view I myself take. It may be said that there is something rather arbitrary in accepting as a stopper — 'people just are like that' — a psychological mechanism connecting frustration and a tendency to aggression, while rejecting one connecting high socio-economic status and a tendency to vote. But I think it is possible to produce sensible criteria.

This, incidentally, is the point at which the name of Max Weber usually gets thrown in. For what it is worth I would suggest that Weber's most famous explanation — the connection between Protestantism and capitalism — operates partially by invoking something like the mechanism of cognitive dissonance reduction rather than by putting forward an analysis that would have been accepted by the actors themselves. That is, Weber uses as an explanation of the 'worldly asceticism' of Calvinists the 'tension' that arises from the belief that one's salvation or damnation is predestined by God and that there can be no salvation by works and yet at the same time believing...
that (although there is no infallible sign that one is among the elect) the style of life of 'worldly asceticism' is one that only the elect will in fact be able to adhere to. The tension is (somewhat) released by trying to live this style of life, and playing down in one's own mind the idea that this cannot make any difference to one's predetermined fate. Clearly, although this is perfectly 'understandable', it is a description of the situation that an orthodox Calvinist would have been bound to reject if it had been put to him.2

However, it would obviously be a useful starting point in any explanation of voting behaviour to know why people say that they vote. Oddly enough, although people are often asked in surveys why they voted one way or the other (or which party they support) I do not know of any systematic attempt to find out by asking people why they vote at all.

This looks like an obvious Ph.D. topic for somebody. Meanwhile, we have introspection and casual empiricism, plus articles on the subject which are apparently based on the same sources. All these suggest that we can divide the main motives actuating people into two groups.

The first group consists of favourable attitudes towards the act of voting as such (i.e. irrespective of the direction of the vote cast). This would include notions of one's duty as a citizen, voting conceived of as expression of support for the system, and so on. I am inclined, however, to doubt whether this pro-attitude to voting as such is very widespread. I think most people who vote start from a preference for one outcome rather than another. There may be a few people who start by deciding to vote and then wonder how to vote — every canvasser must have come across a few people who say 'Yes, I'll definitely vote but I won't decide which way to vote until I get to the polling station' — but I believe such people to be rare.

The second group of motives consists of favourable attitudes to voting for one candidate (or in a referendum one side on an issue) as against another. This need not —
and I'm pretty sure usually does not — depend on any strong expectation of individually changing the result of the election or referendum from what it would otherwise be. It is quite adequately motivated by a line of reasoning that runs along the following lines:

1. I should like to see X win.
2. Assuming the votes are counted honestly, X will win if and only if enough people vote for him.
3. I have the opportunity to vote for X.
4. There is a certain pragmatic inconsistency in wanting an outcome that will be produced if and only if enough people vote for X and at the same time not voting for X myself.

This is obviously no more than a slightly refined variant on the quotation from *Phineas Finn* which appears at the beginning of this book, and I am bound to say that compared to Benn's far more elaborate construction I find this to have two advantages: it is more sensible and it reflects the sort of reasoning that (I believe) people do in fact go through.

Clearly, such reasoning is not based upon utilitarian premises, but since it seems manifest that there are very few (if any) consistent utilitarians around it would have to be regarded as a defect of any account purporting to explain why people actually vote that it rested upon utilitarian premises.

Whether or not the reasoning I outlined constitutes a rational ground for voting is, I must admit, a question that I do not find very meaningful. It seems to me that 'rationality' is a concept that can function only within a well-specified context. However, two things can be said to rebut any suggestion of irrationality.

First, it can at least be said that a decision to vote based on these premises would not rest on false beliefs or incorrect calculations. It would not depend upon a grotesquely exaggerated idea of the probability that the result would turn on one vote, for example.

Second, it would not be merely expressive behaviour. Obviously, expressive behaviour need not be irrational in
some weak sense of ‘rationality’: if you want to express yourself in some way and do what you want then you are not being irrational. In this hospitable sense of ‘rationality’, however, very little would fail to be rational. (In fact, only acts carried out because of a belief that they would have some further effect would be candidates.) Singing songs in the bath (to take one of Benn’s examples) would be as rational a way of acting in accordance with one’s disapproval of the government as any other — more if it gave more satisfaction.

Benn, though, appears to want a more stringent sense of rationality and to show that voting does, while singing songs in the bath does not, satisfy the relevant criteria. I do not think that he succeeds in showing that voting and other forms of participation are rational in any sense stronger than that in which all forms of expressive behaviour may be said to be rational, in those cases in which it is not justified by its direct instrumental effects. (And it is the cases where it cannot be justified by its direct instrumental effects that interest him.) By contrast, I believe that the kind of distinction he wants could be drawn by operating with the kind of reasoning I (and Anthony Trollope) offered.

According to Benn, to count as political a participatory act must either be instrumental — ‘calculated to effect a political outcome’ — or it must be ‘more or less ritualistic’. Now this is, for a start, a pretty debased view of ritual. Normally, somebody who engages in a ritual thinks he is doing something important, not that he is engaging in an act that is ‘symbolic and ritualistic in its context, where no actual change can be brought about by doing it’. He is making rain, eating the body and blood of Christ, conferring a degree, opening parliament, etc.

To say that these are rituals (or rites) is, I think, to say roughly that they are performances where the thing is not considered to be done properly unless some strictly prescribed ceremonial forms are gone through. Voting is not at all highly ritualised in this sense. A wide variety of
ways of casting votes, counting votes and announcing the results is accepted and considerations of efficiency are allowed quite full play.

What voting does have in common with rituals is precisely a belief in their efficacy. If the Hopi believe that so many Hopi dancing for so many hours produce so much rain, it is rational for them to dance. Similarly, if British citizens believe that so many votes on such-and-such a side will produce a certain government, they are rational to vote. In both cases there are 'free rider' problems, but it is, I suggest, not irrational to refuse to be a free rider on benefits provided by others who are symmetrically placed in relation to it (i.e. where there is no special reason why they rather than you should contribute).

By contrast, the sense of a 'ritualistic' act employed by Benn, to mean an action from which no good can possibly come, seems to me a parasitic one. We call an action 'ritualistic' in this sense when it once had a point but where conditions have degenerated so that it no longer has a point. Thus an appeal procedure might be said to be 'ritualistic' if the appeals are invariably and rapidly turned down. Ritualistic behaviour of this kind may be close to compulsive behaviour, as when someone forms a habit of doing something and then continues to do it after the rational justification for it has ended.

Voting could, under certain circumstances, be ritualistic in this derogatory sense. Thus, in some places it is well known that election results are fixed, and that it has been decided in advance what results will be declared irrespective of the actual votes cast. Voting then would indeed be ritualistic, and it might well be better to abstain as a protest. Less sharply, elections would also be ritualistic to the extent that politicians were corrupt and could be expected to sell out to the highest bidder, whatever their promises, or if the country were so much in the grip of some internal or external power unaccountable to and uncontrollable by the government.
that it made no difference who won elections and formed the government.  

Some people affect to believe that some or all of these later conditions are met in all the countries with competitive elections, but I judge that Benn does not and nor do I. It therefore seems to me an ill-service to treat voting as a ‘ritualistic’ act merely because a single vote is unlikely to sway the result. This fails to make the crucial distinction between countries in which the aggregate of votes cast does determine the government and where the government in turn does to some degree carry out its promises, and countries where these conditions do not hold. Voting is rational (on the basis of the kind of reasoning I set out) in the first kind of country but not in the second.

It seems to me the least we can ask of a theory of participation is that it should make that distinction. But on Benn’s theory of voting as a ‘ritualistic’ act expressing one’s attitudes, it would seem that voting is equally rational in both cases. In neither is it instrumentally rational (since ex hypothesi in neither case can an individual vote alter things) but in both it is presumably rational as a ritualistic form of conventionally-designated self-expression.

Voting is a particularly clear case since, under favourable conditions, the aggregate votes cast are not merely causally efficacious but actually constitutive of the election result. But many other acts of individual political participation are rational in the sense that they add up to an effect on the real world. Even tooting a V-sign, to take an example given by Benn, may indeed be a rational act. If enough people toot, they will know that there is a lot of opposition to the occupying forces. This may embolden people to undertake other acts (e.g. sabotage) of direct effectiveness, knowing they can count on widespread support and protection, and in any case it is bad for the morale of the occupying forces.

I assume, of course, that the convention of a V-sign as a sign of opposition has been established. My point is that
it is not *this* that makes tooting rational, as Benn would maintain. The symbolic connection is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the rationality of tooting.

Politics is a serious business. In any state with well-developed administrative competence it determines, by activity or default, the distribution of food, housing, medical and educational services, etc., and (in interaction with other states) whether weapons of mass destruction are to be unleashed. I believe that Benn thinks so too and is anxious to show that it is rational to play one's part in a serious way. But unfortunately the form of justification he has offered, in terms of self-expression, is a charter for frivolity. It offers aid and comfort to the politics of the beautiful people — the radical chic of the Boston-Washington corridor and the London-Oxbridge triangle. The last fifteen years have seen too much of people for whom politics is a sort of psychic adventure playground, and in my view political philosophers should be trying to knock the props out from under the self-esteem of these folk rather than rationalising it. As between Lady Bountiful and Leonard Bernstein give me Lady Bountiful — at least the poor got some soup and blankets out of her.

Ritualistic activity does exist in politics and provides a lot of unjustifiable self-satisfaction to those who take part in it. The last years of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament provide a perfect illustration. I think we should be saying loud and clear that this is not rational and that if people really feel concern for justice and oppression it is up to them to look around for ways of doing something about it.

**NOTES**


2 See also for a rejection of the view that Weber was a forerunner of

3 'Rite' and 'ritual' both derive from the Latin *ritus*, simply meaning ceremony, and the definition of both refers to prescribed forms of observance. 'Rite' was, according to the O.E.D., established first, the earliest citation dating from about 1315. 'Ritual', derived from the adjectival form *ritualis*, began as an adjective and (although the O.E.D. does not draw the distinction) would appear to have specialised more in the derogatory sense, in that the earliest citation (from Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*) runs 'Contayning no maner of doctrine . . . but onley certayn ritual decrees to no purpose'. And, of course, to call something 'ritualistic' is almost to guarantee that no good can come of it — compare 'individualistic', 'psychologistic', 'economistic', 'rationalistic', 'capitalistic', 'materialistic', 'socialistic', 'communistic', 'atheistic', 'scientistic', 'formalistic', etc.

4 Thus, according to Laurence Wylie, the voter in Peyrane 'uses the ballot as an insult to organized power. A few literal-minded voters cannot content themselves with expressing a destructive vote. They write insulting words on the ballot, even though they know the writing will cause their votes to be thrown out'. *Village in the Vaucluse*, New York, 1964, pp. 330-1. Why not, if voting is just a matter of expressing yourself and makes no difference? Wylie, however, regards this form of 'participation' — where 'the vote is used as a gesture' (p. 336) — as pathological and asks 'Why do they not act collectively and creatively to control the power instead of simply cursing it? Why do they not make positive use of the one real weapon at their disposal — the vote?' (p. 331). It seems to me that Wylie is right to see this as an alternative pattern of behaviour, but Benn would presumably be obliged to say that 'collective action' is a mirage and the choice is only between different gestures.

5 I like the way that J. W. Burrow puts the distinction between rational and non-rational action in *Evolution and Society*, London, 1966, when he says that 'non-rational' conduct may be regarded, for our present purpose, as conduct which is reverential, ceremonial, status-ordered, as distinct from practical, calculating, "useful"'. Voting is not, it seems to me, aptly described for most people as reverential, ceremonial or status-ordered, yet Benn's treatment of it as the ritual expression of a 'role' would presumably bring it within the sphere of the non-rational, as defined by Burrow.

6 For an analysis of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament as a politics of 'symbolic protest' see Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism*, Manchester, 1968. According to Parkin 'the main pay-off for middle class radicals is that of a psychological or emotional kind — in satisfactions derived from expressing personal values in action' (p. 2).
Comment
Martin Hollis

Voting may be an expressive act, Professor Benn suggests, and none the less rational for that. Some men have a conception of themselves which leads them to act out their civic role by voting in rain or shine, however little difference their vote will make. It will have occurred to his audience that the references both to self-conceptions and to a civic role can be deleted without loss. Indeed it has occurred to Benn himself. But it seems to me that he should stick to his guns.

One case for dispensing with a civic role is that there is no such role. Notoriously writers are often cavalier about multiplying roles. Benn's role of darts player, for instance, strikes me as spurious. His reason for inventing it is perhaps partly that the game has binding rules of play and partly that a certain amount of ritual goes with it, at least in the pubs of Olde England. But nothing is achieved by adding a role of darts player to a description of how darts players conduct themselves, except to create an illusion that an explanation has been given. A role-theory which supplies a role for every socially significant action explains nothing, to my mind. That is no doubt why sociologists usually define a role as the normative expectations attached to a social position. By this test, I submit, there is no civic role, because there is no social position of civis. (There is a position of elector with a role, but that role carries no duty to vote.) Yet, even if we waive a strict definition, on the grounds that something is expected of citizens, there is still the fact that only in
some social circles does the something include actually voting. The work in Benn's paper is therefore being done by the agent's own beliefs and not by a scheme of public norms.

One case for dispensing with mention of self-conceptions is that, while some men do no doubt act from principle, they do not always do it in a self-conscious, even narcissistic way. Hence reference to a self appears mere flummery, adding nothing to explain the simple point that some people vote as a matter of principle. Deleting Accordingly, we seem to be left with a clearer and equally stout thesis: casting a crucial vote is not the only end rationally pursued by voting; the relation of means to end is not always that of instrumental act to consequences; voting can be the expression of a principle.

But now the mountain has given birth to a mouse. The slim-line thesis says in effect that some people vote because they think it important, whatever the result. At best this restates the original problem. At worst it lays Benn open to a charge of trying to pass off as a truth what is but a methodological precept (thus making a boomerang of his complaint against Riker and Ordeshook). Moreover, since a voter has to attach some importance or other to attending the poll, if he is to get there at all, it threatens to make all expressive acts of voting equally and vacuously rational.

To avoid bathos, then, we need some constraint on what the act of voting can be taken to express. The act will have to be on the one hand significant in its context or ideal-typical, and on the other hand rational for the agent or expressive of a principle integral to his way of life. The former requirement would be met by citing a role of civis, if there was one; the latter by invoking a self, if that added anything. What shall we use as a peg? Hesitantly, I propose the notion of an identity. Being an active citizen can be part of a man's 'social identity', and sociologists use that (far from clear) term to connect individuals to the sort of scheme of significant references
which lends itself to the construction of ideal types. Congruently, the idea of acts of affirmation or self-definition can be made relevant to the unsolved puzzle of finding criteria for personal identity. Admittedly it is by no means obvious that ‘identity’ has the same sense in both cases or a clear sense in either. But I am not trying to solve Benn’s problem at a stroke — only to urge that it should not be debunked. Explanation does not need a peg.

My final query is how rationality comes into the explanation of expressive acts. Benn admits to bringing it in only because logic requires that a man who really holds a principle shall act on it when occasion arises. But I suspect that he also believes some principles or ends more rational than others. If he is hinting that the autonomous man whose social state is that of *civis* will rationally express democratic principles in his actions, then his lurking tie between rationality and morality would be laid bare. In that case, he has my vote.
I was asked by Mr Benn to contribute to this discussion from what he calls the 'participationist' viewpoint. The label is convenient but we do not yet have a well-worked out participatory democratic alternative to liberal democratic theory (or practice). I shall thus offer an outline of a critique of the general argument and approach of the present papers that might form part of the basis for such an alternative.

The most immediately striking feature of the papers is the abstract and apolitical fashion in which voting is discussed. The papers, including Benn's, follow the tradition of liberal democratic political philosophy and treat political participation or, more narrowly, voting, as the result of a discrete calculation of private interests by an isolated individual. It is assumed that participation can be understood, and its rationality exhibited, by focusing on the individual separately from the operation of the political system in which the participation takes place — although the result of this exercise is held to tell us something about actual participation in existing liberal democratic states. Given this abstractly individualistic perspective it is hardly surprising that voting poses a problem. Indeed, it is a problem that appears as insoluble as the other problems about social activities thrown up by a liberal individualism notoriously prone to scepticism. The problem of voting is presented as part of a general philosophical problem about individual rationality, not as a political problem of
liberal democracy. Until the nature of the problem is seen differently no convincing solution will be found to the question whether or not voting is a rational activity. Individuals must not be seen abstractly, but in the context of their political relationships and, also, critical questions must be asked about the liberal democratic political system and not merely about individual motivations.

This last point is related to a second feature of the papers. Although political participation is virtually identified with voting, only Barry makes any reference to the vast amount of empirical data available on voting. Moreover, what is perhaps the most well-established finding of empirical political science, namely, that political participation is an activity that tends to be engaged in by (male) individuals from upper socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, is ignored in the discussion. Yet to ask about the 'rationality' of political participation in liberal democratic states is not only to ask why any randomly chosen citizen may, or may not, choose to be politically active, but to ask why participation tends to be systematically divided along class and sex lines.

I have suggested that liberal, abstract individualism must be abandoned if an answer is to be found to the problem of voting. However, this perspective does insist that the point of voting is its instrumental effectiveness for the citizen. A major objection to Benn's attempt to rescue the rationality of voting from Downs is that instrumental effectiveness flies out the window along with baggage that needs discarding, and he reduces voting to little more than an individual expressive gesture. If the rationality of participation is exemplified by actions that have little or no likelihood of being politically effective, but are primarily expressive, then it is difficult to see why we are concerned whether voting is 'rational' or not. Whatever the defects of liberal democratic theory, it gives a clear answer to the question: Why is it worth exercising the franchise? Voting, it is argued, makes a difference to
political life and, hence, to individuals' lives. It is the means through which policies can be influenced and, potentially, the means through which individuals can control and create their own political community. Bunce was willing to leave his family and demonstrate for the vote, and middle-class women were willing to undergo the torture of forcible feeding, because they believed that the franchise was necessary for their well-being as individuals, whether as working men or members of the female sex. This is not to say that the belief was not also based on political principles or morality, but that they expected the vote to do more than 'express' or 'manifest' their beliefs; they expected it to change the social and political world and to put the principles into practice. If voting makes no impact on inequality, injustice, and lack of freedom, then it may be as rational to sing in the bath to 'express' one's principles.

Downs's interpretation of instrumental effectiveness is extremely narrow and Barry is surely right to argue that most people do not expect their individual vote to be decisive. But they do expect voting to make a difference, and the problem of the rationality of voting then becomes one of the actual operation of the liberal democratic electoral mechanism. It is interesting to note that in the most recent, large-scale, empirical study of participation, Participation in America, it is concluded that the problem of 'rationality' is that of the form of the electoral mechanism, not individual motivation or human nature. The question that has to be asked concerns the validity of the belief that elections work in practice as liberal democratic theory and politicians and the mass media tell citizens that it does. Are citizens acting rationally who vote on the basis of such a belief; or is the electoral abstention, and even greater abstention from other conventional forms of participation by lower SES citizens the rational response? Empirical evidence gives support to the latter suggestion, for it shows that a good deal of doubt exists among those least likely to participate that their vote makes any difference to the way the system
operates. That this doubt is not completely irrational is indicated by the evidence of Participation in America, that political participation 'helps those who are already better off'. Can it be seen as rational to go on performing an action that reinforces a socially disadvantaged position? And the citizen may well have doubts about the worth of the franchise when she considers the activities of the Nixon administration, the dismissal of the twice-elected Labor government by the Australian Governor-General, the bloody coup in Chile, or the 'advice' given by the Americans to the Italians on the exercise of their vote. On the other hand, many citizens from lower SES backgrounds do vote, and, if account is taken of the political culture of liberal democracy, it might be concluded that these citizens are not being irrational but, rather, are acting as rationally as they can. Benn's argument rests heavily on the idea of 'standard' ways of acting politically, and individuals in liberal democracies are told from all sides that voting is the democratic way to act. A person may be doubtful about the point of voting but, if she wishes to act 'democratically', especially if lacking in middle-class education, skills, and confidence, may find it difficult to see what else to do.

All this raises some fundamental questions about the nature of voting in liberal democracies. It is usually, as in these papers, seen as the paradigm of political participation but there is an important question to be answered about the sense in which voting is a politically meaningful act for citizens. Certainly, as Benn argues, it is 'functionally rational' for the system, but it is significant that he also refers to it as a ritual. Voting can often (usually?) be seen as a ritual in liberal democracies in Barry's sense of a 'strictly prescribed ceremonial form'; unless the ceremony is performed — and voting is seen as something 'special' — a 'government' does not exist. Voting, it could be argued, far from being instrumentally effective, serves as a ritual affirmation or legitimation of certain individuals' accession to office. Citizens may obtain some expressive satisfaction from
going to the polls (and surveys indicate that many see voting as a duty) but their vote is empty of real political impact.

The question of the political significance of the vote is bound up with Hollis's criticism that Benn's 'civic role' does not exist. Benn writes of citizens acting in a 'public spirited' fashion in this role, but if I help an old gentleman across the road I may act in the right spirit but do nothing to show that a truly civic or political 'role' does, or can, exist in liberal democracies. The decision theory of voting has been so influential precisely because it is a 'scientific' variant of the conception of the individual central to liberal theory from its beginnings. This conception sees the individual's political action, like all other actions, in terms of the pursuit of private interests. (No wonder the vote appears of such dubious relevance!) This paradoxical view of the citizen's 'political role' is joined with another; in voting, the individual chooses a few others to make political decisions for all, that is in voting, the individual alienates the right to make political decisions and denies the need for further action on her part. Liberal democratic theory and practice rest on the denial that citizens can have a specifically political role. Although Benn criticises the Downsian account of individual motivation he fails to consider its relationship to liberal democratic theory and practice as a whole. Thus he fails to see that there are basic problems in trying to insert his own view of participation, based not on self-interest but on political principles and beliefs, into a liberal democracy that he takes for granted.

Benn's criticisms of the decision-theory of individual motivation could be taken much further. Neither he nor the other contributors mention the sex of the 'individual' whom they are discussing; but it is unlikely to be female. If most political philosophy and political science had not been written by males for a largely male audience this view of motivation could hardly have survived so long or been treated so seriously. Most of its proponents will deny
it every day as they receive the services of their wives and accept the argument that married women are ‘naturally’ motivated by love and self-sacrifice, not ‘rational’ calculations of self-interest. To be sure, women are now enfranchised and share the same formal opportunities for participation as men, but this means that either an account of the rationality of participation has to include both men and women, and thus women’s tendency to abstain, or the decision-theory model is retained as specifically male and a sex-differential account must be produced of the ‘rationality’ of voting.

Benn has begun to move away from the humanly impoverished decision-theory model but his own account fails to get to grips with the problem whether liberal democracy can provide an adequate basis for the actual development of a ‘political self’ in its citizens. Benn’s argument, that is, begs the question of the actual relationship of individuals and their institutions, principles, and beliefs in liberal democracies. His discussion of the responsible moral person again treats the individual in abstraction from political relationships. He refers to individuals engaging in ‘creative enterprises’ which are based on principle, and which enable the individual, in turn, to ‘test’ the principles. This is fine — except that the question is by-passed whether voting really is an example of such activity. The liberal democratic ‘private citizen’ is encouraged to see her life as a collection of fragmented, competing, and separate ‘interests’ to which political activity has only a marginal relevance, and it is difficult to see how this contributes to the building of a political self; indeed, liberal democratic political culture denies that women are ‘naturally’ capable of such development.

Benn equips his morally responsible individual with certain principles and here there are difficulties for his argument that run deeper than the questions I have already touched upon. As Schumpeter graphically stated, liberal democracy is a ‘political method’. That is to say, it is a method or procedure for arriving at decisions, not a
principled, collective undertaking. There are political principles integrally associated with liberal democracy, but these are interpreted in purely formal terms as part of the 'method'; for example, political equality is seen in terms of universal suffrage and liberal democratic theorists are able to present political equality as a common status of 'citizens', or as the essence of a 'civic role', that transcends all the social inequalities and competing interests that divide individuals. In a trivial sense there is thus no problem in seeing the vote as an 'expression' of a belief in the principle of political equality. However, if Benn's individual wishes to 'give expression' to a principle of social and political equality in the substantive sense that the principle orders the social and political relationships of the community, she is asking for something that runs counter to the liberal democratic conception of politics and political life. Moreover, if she believes that voting may be the way in which such a substantive principle can be put into practice she should consider not only the questions about voting already raised, but also that the 'political method' and its electoral mechanism developed, and has been consolidated, as the most suitable 'method' for regulating and maintaining a social system where social inequalities are demanded by, and generated by, the capitalist market economy.

Enough should now have been said to illustrate that a 'participationist' will reject the claim that the same general argument and theoretical perspective can show that it is rational for any individual to participate in the liberal democratic state, and provide a basis for a participatory democratic theory of political participation. The latter demands a radical reconstruction of democratic theory, including its conception of the political itself, together with an answer to the question of what form of political and social institutions will encourage instrumentally effective voting and the development of a political self, and can be ordered by substantive political principles, or a political
morality, on the basis of which citizens, collectively, can create and sustain their own political community. An argument of this kind is a return to the tradition of Rousseau, mentioned by Benn in his opening remarks, and a rejection of the political theory and practice that developed as an integral part of the development of the capitalist economy and its liberal, constitutional state. Before the argument is swept away by the theorists of the liberal democratic state on the grounds of 'lack of realism', it is worth asking how 'realistic' all the years of theorising have been that have discussed the 'rationality' of voting without asking some crucial questions about the set of institutions within which the vote is cast.

NOTES
1 It would be interesting to place the present discussion more firmly in the context of the discussion of the rationality of voting and voters of the past thirty years or so. Empirical studies have been happy to call voters irrational and to see this as necessary for the smooth operation of a successful political system. Despite Benn's attempt to rehabilitate the rationality of the voter he reaches (p. 21) a similar conclusion about the action of the citizen and its 'functional rationality' for the system.
2 The same question must also be asked about the 'costs' of voting: most discussions see it as unremarkable that the costs are regarded so differently by upper and lower classes and the sexes. I have discussed costs in my chapter in G. Almond and L. Rose (eds.), The Civic Culture Revisited (forthcoming).
4 Ibid., p. 338.
5 The fact that ways of counting votes, etc. may differ in liberal democracies does not alter this point; religious ceremonies differ in details too.
6 I have discussed the paradoxes of the liberal democratic conception of the political more fully in my 'Sublimation and reification: Locke, Wolin and the liberal democratic conception of the political', Politics and Society, 5, 1975, pp. 441-67.
Since four out of five commentators have raised direct questions about the concept of rational action deployed in my paper, that is clearly the proper place to begin. Barry is clearly puzzled by it (p. 43); Ryan says (p. 35) he is baffled by 'the task of giving an account of voting which makes it wholly rational and wholly non-instrumental', and asks whether some sorts of non-instrumental behaviour are more rational than others. Wollheim chides me gently for not paying more attention to the concept of rationality, which he finds imprecise (p. 27). Hollis urges me to join substantive requirements for rationality to the formal ones on which I have relied. To this last proposal I can reply only that if I knew how to do it, I gladly would.¹

Central to the formal notion is the requirement that a rational agent acknowledge his commitments. A person will not be formally rational in his beliefs, actions, or attitudes if in adopting or maintaining one of these he does not take account of his existing or surrounding epistemic or practical commitments. In the case of belief, this amounts at least to his having a regard for rules of inference. In the case of action, if, having an overriding preference for p's being the case (i.e. wanting p above everything else) he nevertheless does nothing towards making it so, there will be an unresolved inconsistency between what he is committed to do and what he actually does. These are, broadly speaking, standard conditions
for rationality in belief and action. But I suggest that we
need to recognise another, corresponding to the notion of
Wertrationalität. If A says 'I believe in \( p \)' (i.e. he cares
about \( p \) in a principled way) he commits himself to
approving forms of action that favour \( p \)'s being the case
and to acting in ways likely to promote it, and conversely
for attacks on \( p \). But there are also conventionally
appropriate ways of manifesting this approval and
disapproval. If no instrumentally effective action were
open, there would be grounds for doubting the truth of
A's avowal, or his understanding of what 'believing in \( p \)
means, if he failed to manifest his belief in one or other of
these conventional ways. His avowal rationally commits
him to some appropriate action, unless he has some
countervailing reason. Otherwise he is bound in reason to
withdraw it. 'Not feeling like it' or 'not wanting to be
bothered' will not do as a practical reason since it merely
describes an inclination; to count, the inclination would
itself have to be 'rationalised' as 'I don't feel like it by
virtue of its being . . .'..

Understanding one's commitment would itself be
motivating for anyone concerned to be rational. But
there may be a further motivating consideration: accepting the alternative of disavowal may involve a
heavy cost. The agent may find that his other attitudes
commit him to despising himself for not believing in \( p \); so
he would be committed to a fairly radical reorganisation
of his conception of himself that may still be
unacceptable given his other principled beliefs. This is
not an appeal to narcissism. His reason for acting is his
recognition of his commitment, given his belief. It is not
to think well of himself. But the practical force of his
belief, its power to move him, depends on its place in the
total structure of his principles, in the constitution of his
identity. To the extent that believing in \( p \) is important in
it, it commits him to appropriate action not only in a
theoretical or inferential sense of 'committed' but
practically: 'He can't do anything else', as we say.

My phrase 'expressing one's attitudes' may have misled
my critics into believing that I stand for a romantic, emotional self-expressionism. Barry in particular seems to think so (pp. 44, 47). And Ryan asks (p. 35) whether my thesis is that an institution can offer opportunities for expressing our allegiances that others do not offer, as a poetic medium might in respect of particular emotions. I should have done better, perhaps, to have spoken of ‘manifesting principled dispositions’. I intended to suggest that we form our political beliefs and attitudes within a political culture, which supplies us, too, with a structure of political concepts in terms of which we ‘place’ or identify ourselves. Our political ‘selves’ are constituted by a set of principles, ideals, and loyalties that carry the kind of commitments I have alluded to. It is a set of this kind, not a set of emotions or feelings, that is expressed or manifested in rational action; and it is expressed no less in instrumental than in non-instrumental action. So to ask, as Ryan does (p. 35) : what is the point of an individual’s expressing his allegiances in appropriate non-instrumental ways? is like asking for the point of a religious person’s affirming his faith in God, attending church, spending time in prayer, and so on. One might take any one activity and ask what is its place in the complex of practices and beliefs constituting ‘being religious’. But someone’s reason for acting in such a way would be sufficiently characterised and rationalised (in Wollheim’s sense) by saying ‘he did it because he had religious principles’, or ‘was a religious person’. In a democratic political culture voting is a standard way of manifesting concern for values such as justice and freedom that, as Wollheim correctly points out, ‘happen to relate to politics’ though not exclusively so (p. 28). When in the political arena these values are seriously at issue, a person who claimed to care about them would display what Barry terms (p. 43) ‘a pragmatic inconsistency’ were he to abstain, as much as would a professed Catholic who never went to Mass.

Rational action is rational, then, because it maintains consistency with avowed belief, even where consequentially effective courses of action are unavailable. But the forms that conventional expression
must take are neither arbitrary nor are they like poetic media that are more or less apt for expressing emotions. I suggested in the final paragraphs of my paper that the connections between principles and practices were not random (pp. 20-1). Indeed, I invoked the notion of functional rationality to characterise relations such that, if masses of people manifested their belief in the principle through the conventionally appropriate practice, it would tend to bring about a state of affairs in which the principle prevailed. Functional rationality is rather like the notion that Ryan invokes in his account of the ideology of Prussian soldiers, whose attitudes to death, though non-instrumental, were (as I put it) such as a benevolent demiurge anxious to keep down casualties might well have supplied them with. But while the soldiers' survival was promoted by the ideology, it was, paradoxically enough, a telos that the believers themselves professed to scorn. For them, the point was surely that battles should be won and honour preserved. But by and large their devotion to their principle tended to bring this about as well.

Anyone with the rational curiosity to analyse his own principles and the forms of action to which they committed him could well grasp these hypothetical causal relations between principles, practice, and the realisation of the ideal. I suppose Bunce could be said to be doing just this in the epigraph from Phineas Finn. That does not make werttrational action into instrumental action; but it does suggest that the principles for the sake of which we act generally do relate value and action in the way that Barry and Bunce have in mind. But a rational agent would not think of this relation as providing a direct reason for action if he believed either that such action would not be general or, conversely, that it would; either way, his would be a quite insignificant defection. His own reason for action would have to be his commitment to the principle informing it, just as a religious person's performance of ritual is a part of his religious commitment, however much or little he expects that a world of devout persons will actually bring about the kingdom of God. It was to stress this connection
that I introduced the notion of ritual that so distressed Barry.3

Barry's consequentialism and 'pragmatic inconsistency'.

Barry's notion of 'pragmatic inconsistency' comes so close to my own conception of practical rationality that I am surprised that he found it necessary to mount so vigorous an attack. This is due in part to his overestimating his own utilitarianism, in part to his underestimating mine. Of course, my paper is, among other things, an attack on utilitarianism, as unable 'to account for and rationalise' (in Wollheim's sense) certain forms of political behaviour which (a) occur, (b) would not generally be thought irrational, but which, (c) taking the actions of others as constants, do not seem to show, in respect of acts of particular agents taken in isolation, a positive balance of probable benefits over probable costs, whether to the agent alone or to humanity at large (the agent included). In such instances, a strict utilitarian would not have a reason for political action — indeed, he might have a reason for abstaining from it. However pleased he might be about what other people do, his reasons for being pleased would not be capable of motivating him to do same; there is nothing irrational in a utilitarian's rejoicing at the happy outcome of the irrational acts of others.

Barry's response to this criticism is perplexing. Though he first concedes that all this would be true of an egoist, he can't resist a rescue operation, arguing that utilitarians could overcome the problem by offering selective incentives. But there is no disagreement about that; indeed, my allusion to Australian democracy (p. 6) makes the same point. It is irrelevant, however, since the paradox of participation is not about how to get people to participate but to explain why they do so in the absence of selective incentives, and why so many people think there is a reason why they should. Equally irrelevant is the suggestion that there might be no determinate optimal strategy in a participation game in which all players were rational egoists (p. 39). A rational
egoist in our actual situation would be making a bad mistake if he supposed his choice of strategy depended on a game theoretic solution, since inductive inference is open to him. If a 75 per cent turnout is usual, it would be rational *ceteris paribus* to continue to expect it, irrespective of whether all those voters were being rational in turning out.

But Barry is really prepared to leave egoism aside as irredeemable. Not so with utilitarianism, on behalf of which he puts up a sharper fight. Voting, he claims, is an exceptional, not a standard case of political action because it depends on threshold effects arising from the rule ‘winner takes all’. Such effects are sufficiently unusual for the voting paradox to be treated as a freak. Usually, if a lot of X is good (or bad) then a little of X is good (or bad) too. Consequently though a certain amount of good dispersed through a large population may leave only a little for each, it must count nevertheless as a positive consideration because for a utilitarian it is the aggregate, not the size of the particular share, which counts. I have my doubts about this as an argument, since the particular shares may be so small that the difference between enjoying and not enjoying them may be imperceptible. Jonathan Glover provided a witty parable in a recent paper, intended to make a point very similar to Barry’s. He supposes 100 villagers about to lunch, each with 100 beans; 100 bandits descend on them and each eats the whole of one villager’s share. A week later, converted by the doctrine that to take all of a man’s lunch does him harm but that the harm in taking only one bean out of a hundred would be imperceptible and therefore no harm at all, they again descend on the village, but this time each bandit takes only one bean from each villager. The moral is evidently that many a mickle makes a muckle.

Yet the parable misfires. Any converted utilitarian bandit would now have a reason, admittedly, for not robbing a single peasant of his whole bowl of beans, and for not advocating, initiating, or approving a conspiracy of 100 bandits to take one bean each from each villager’s bowl. But in the absence of a conspiracy, if a bandit
believes (a) that every other bandit would in fact take one bean from each bowl, and one bean left to each villager would fall below the threshold at which beans would do a villager any good at all, then the bandit would have a utilitarian reason for himself taking one bean from each bowl. Alternatively (b) if he believes that whatever he does no other bandit would now take a bean from each bowl, and if the loss of one bean to a villager would be imperceptible, then the bandit would again have a reason for taking one bean from each. Since the bandit's having 100 beans is preferable to his having none, and since every peasant would have to be indifferent as between having 99 and having 100 beans (since he can not ex hypothesi tell the difference), taking the beans is the Paretian optimal course. Furthermore, if he knows that a conspiracy is being formed, he has no reason for not joining it, once it reaches the take-off point, for he can then look forward to situation (a). Of course, he can deplore this state of affairs; but from a consequentialist point of view there is a yawning gap between having a reason for deploiring a set-up, and having a reason for not making the best of a bad job, where the 'best' increases one's own utility without making a perceptible difference to the utility of anyone else. Analogously, if Barry's beauty spot is already so littered that it has ceased to be beautiful it would seem hardly worth the bother to stuff one's toffee paper in one's pocket.

Barry underestimates the importance not only of threshold effects but of the probability of outcomes weighed against costs. He loads the argument by stipulating that voting shall be taken to have only small opportunity costs, while the success of one party rather than another is supposed to have momentous consequences. Since the expected utility of a course of action is the sum of the utilities of its possible outcomes each discounted by its probability, one can always match an argument based on one of the probabilities being very small by supposing that the corresponding utility will be large enough to compensate for it. But apart from the dubious question whether the probability that my vote
will make a difference of \( \frac{1}{4} \) per cent to the GNP is worth more than the expected utility of anything else I can do in fifteen minutes, there are other instances of political action (such as acts of protest in concentration camps) where the expected utility of the act is certainly negative, since the probability that any good could come of it is infinitesimal, and brutal punishment virtually certain. In my view, the inadequacy of the utilitarian's criteria for what is to count as a reason for action is demonstrated as much by his inability to 'rationalise' behaviour of this kind as to rationalise voting behaviour. For I should be unwilling to have to say that both were necessarily irrational — i.e. done without good reason and in the face of good reasons for doing the contrary.

When Barry produces his own theory of voting (p. 42) he proceeds to abandon utilitarianism as a theory of action, at any rate in respect of particular actions. If one believes that some form of action or practice would be optimific if a large number of people were to engage in it, this (if I understand Barry's position) is a reason for that person himself not only to approve it, to be pleased that people are disposed to act like that, but to act like that himself. So voting would be 'quite adequately motivated' by 'the line of reasoning' given (p. 43), which is 'a slightly refined version' of Bunce's reasoning. Barry is oddly cautious, however, about calling it a rational ground for voting, because, I fancy, he has an uneasy sense that his notion of 'pragmatic inconsistency' may be committing him after all to unwelcome doctrines. It is this notion that does all the work, both the rationalising and the motivating. Since he refers to it as a 'line of reasoning' which is also 'sensible' he must surely see someone acting on it as having a reason for action; and what warrants the inference from the first three premises to the practical conclusion — voting — must surely be the notion of pragmatic inconsistency that appears on p. 43. For without it 'I want X' and 'I will not vote for X' are by no means inconsistent for anyone who believes either that he will not get X even by voting for it (because not
enough other people will) or that he will get it without voting (because there will be enough people voting without him). Since Bunce-type reasoning does not rely on ‘direct instrumental effects’ (p. 44) but is nevertheless ‘adequately motivated’ (p. 43), avoiding pragmatic inconsistency must be a formal principle of practical reason. Barry claims that it is not irrational to refuse to be a free rider, if there is no special reason why you should be exempt from contribution. But since under appropriate conditions there is demonstrably a utilitarian reason for being one, Barry must be relying on a reason of some other sort that prevails against it. It could be the notion of fairness; but Barry, like Rawls, fails to suggest why this should be a motivating reason in conditions not veiled in ignorance.

Barry’s confessed liking for Burrow’s distinction between rational and non-rational action (p. 48, n. 5), which confines rational action to action calculated to have consequential payoffs, ignores the thrust not only of my argument: that actions for which we should normally say that an agent had a reason would count for Burrow as non-rational (e.g. some voting and protest martyrdom); it ignores just as much the implications of his own thesis that ‘pragmatic consistency’ can furnish a reason, even when the action itself promises no consequential payoff.

Barry’s proposal for a criterion of rational action (for that is what it plainly is, though he hesitates to call it such) is not only non-utilitarian (which he admits) but is only mediately related to ‘efficacy’ (which, on p. 45, he offers by implication as one criterion of rational action). Downs, for instance, would regard it as politically irrational, because inefficient, to vote for a party you wanted to win if you thought it had no chance. Barry’s ‘line of reasoning’ would suggest a different conclusion. Avoiding the pragmatic inconsistency of wanting something but not voting for it begins to look very like my own notion that there is an inconsistency in acknowledging a principle as one’s own and doing nothing about it. For if the act will not be efficacious in
getting the party elected, the pragmatic inconsistency must arise not from just wanting the outcome, but wanting it as Bunce wanted the ballot — because he believed in it as a matter of principle. It was right for him to demonstrate for it irrespective of the number that turned out because it would be inconsistent to believe in it and not to demonstrate.

Barry may object that no action would count as preserving pragmatic consistency unless it would bring about the desired state of affairs if done by enough people. Indeed, his objection to my treating voting as a ritual stems from his mistaken belief that for me rituals are not important, and from his failure to take proper account of my suggestion that principles and political rituals may be connected by the very functional rationality he has in mind. In characterising as ritualistic an individual’s act, done for the sake of a principle with no expectation that it would have direct efficacy, I meant that it could be seriously considered as an act avoiding pragmatic inconsistency only if it conformed to one of the standard modes for expressing principles of that kind. Singing in the bath would not do because an essentially private and idiosyncratic activity cannot be a way of manifesting a commitment to a politically relevant principle like justice or the inviolability of human rights. A virtue of ritual for the individual is that it provides a medium for such expression where instrumentally effective ways are closed to him; but the practice may be functionally rational for all that.

Barry takes particular exception to my characterising voting behaviour in democracies as ritualistic. Elsewhere it may be, and then, he says, it may be better to abstain. But since abstaining will do no good either, the point of abstaining must itself be ritualistic in my sense. The form of the protest is necessarily determined by the society’s other political practices precisely because there is no consequentially effective mode available. Within a democracy voting may be ritualistic because for individuals it is non-instrumentally rational, yet rational
all the same because expressing in a way appropriate to that culture a commitment to politically relevant principles. But it may be rational in precisely the same way in other systems provided the principles are different. To vote for instance in the USSR would be to express one’s commitment, one’s solidarity with the socialist order. The rationality of the individual act of voting or of abstaining depends on its relation to the complex of political practices and the principles they are generally understood to express. Barry is right thus far, then, in saying that rationality is a concept that can function only within a well-specified context. That, of course, was the point of my example of tooting as a political activity.

Pateman gives an account (p. 54) of a theory of voting which comes very close to Barry’s and Bunce’s, and which she seems to think would rationalise voting, were it rational to hold the belief on which it rests: that voting makes a positive difference to the well-being of some or all of the individual members of a society. Whatever its defects, she says, the liberal democratic theory gives a clear answer to the question ‘why is it worth exercising the vote?’ And she appears to accept that if an individual believes the liberal democrat’s answer he has a rational and sufficient motive for voting. If not, the gap remains between rationally approving a practice because it would have certain desirable consequences if enough people participated in it, and making the participatory effort oneself, believing that it cannot affect those consequences one way or another. Now it may be fair criticism of my way of putting the matter, that someone voting in accordance with this theory is engaging in something ‘more than an individual expressive gesture’. But for all the reasons I have given, it is equally wrong to say that his own action exhibits instrumental rationality. Having some principled commitment to a better form of life or society, and believing, like Bunce and the women’s suffragists, that if voting were general that aim might be attained, he votes on pain of being charged with inconsistency if he does not. But the inconsistency is not
that of willing an end but rejecting some necessary means, for one's own vote is almost certainly not necessary to the end. The inconsistency is between claiming to approve and failing to evidence such approval in action.

I freely concede, however, that there is a difference between voting because one believes in the efficacy of the general practice, and demonstrating one's principled attitudes in some ritual or conventionally symbolic way that promises no beneficial payoff at all. It would be frivolous to look around for purely symbolic or conventional ways of manifesting one's principled preferences if one believed that ready to hand was a form of action that if generally practised would get results too. I have suggested, after all, that voting is a conventionally accepted way of manifesting principled attitudes precisely because it is also widely thought to have some effect. But that does not make it instrumentally rational for individual voters severally. When action according to strictly rule-utilitarian principles cannot also be cashed out as act-utilitarian, its rationality is not instrumental. It is the rationality of consistency with principled attitudes, of manifesting one's principled dispositions in appropriate ways, just like the rationality of the concentration camp martyr. Utilitarian reasons for action must either collapse into act-utilitarian reasons, or they cease to be utilitarian at all. But they remain reasons, for all that. So when Pateman says that a person's reason for voting is that she wishes to act democratically, even though the person doubts the point of voting (i.e. the instrumental point), but cannot 'see what else to do', (p. 56) I take her to be making a point in favour of my analysis, not one against it. For according to my account such a person is acting rationally, using a form of action which manifests her principled concern in a conventionally appropriate fashion, because no 'effective' alternative presents itself.
Private interest and public spirit.

I am astonished by Pateman's sweeping claim that liberal democratic theory 'sees the individual's political action ... in terms of the pursuit of private interests' (p. 57). One of the virtues of representative government, according to Mill, is that the private citizen

is called upon ... to weigh interests not his own: to be guided, in cases of conflicting claims, by another rule than his private partialities; to apply at every turn, principles and maxims which have for their reason of existence the common good ... He is made to feel himself one of the public, and whatever is for their benefit to be for his benefit.

And Mill contrasts this with other forms of government 'where this school of public spirit does not exist', where 'there is no unselfish sentiment of identification with the public. Every thought or feeling, either of interest or of duty, is absorbed in the individual and in the family'. Or consider the following passage from L.T. Hobhouse's Liberalism:

in the matter of rights and duties which is cardinal for Liberal theory, the relation of individual to the community is everything. His rights and his duties are alike defined by the common good ... An individual right, then, cannot conflict with the common good, nor could any right exist apart from the common good.7

And he says, of Gladstone: 'By habitually calling upon what was best in men, he deepened the sense of public responsibility and paved the way, half unconsciously, for the fuller exercise of the social conscience'.8 More recently, John Rawls claims that

the grounds for self-government are not solely instrumental. Equal political liberty when assured its fair value is bound to have a profound effect on the moral quality of civic life ... The public will to consult and take everyone's beliefs and interests into account lays the foundations for civic friendship and shapes the ethos of political culture.9
Rawls then paraphrases the passages from Mill quoted above, together with others of similar intent.

Pateman makes the mistake, perhaps, of identifying the whole of liberal theory with one strand, the 'tough-minded' strand, which, it is true, has tended to furnish Anglo-American political scientists since World War II with their models. But even with these it is important not to confuse heuristic devices with psychological analysis. Pateman's reference (p. 57-8) to male theorists who assume motivation to be selfish because they overlook, or take for granted, the selfless devotion of some wives and mothers to their husbands and families, seems to miss both the theoretical point made by Mill, when he contrasts public spirit with absorption in the individual and in the family, and the apparently similar point made by Downs, in assimilating precisely the same 'personal' identification to 'selfish' interests, however 'selfless' in another sense they may be. For Mill, the virtue of public spiritedness is that it extends beyond face-to-face relations and personal affections. Kant could have endorsed it as a truly moral virtue for that reason.

The similar distinction made by Downs has, however, quite a different purpose: to show the possibility of a theory of democracy that does not require public spirit. What is necessary for a political system, as Downs understands it, is some conflict of interests. As Wicksteed says\(^{10}\) of the economic theory of the market, it requires not selfishness but 'non-tuism'. Without conflict, there could be society but not politics. The first part of my paper was designed to show why, like Pateman, I doubt the adequacy of Downs's theory but for the reason that it fails to account for the participation in mass politics that does actually occur. I offer as either an alternative or as a supplementary hypothesis that fulfilling the conditions to which professed principles commit one is a form of rational action, and that some voters at least may have this as their reason for participating. Acting for such reasons constitutes 'rational action' in a sense that enlarges Downs's conception, but in a direction that
seems to be completely in the spirit of Mill, Hobhouse, and Rawls. None of them would find difficulty in understanding why it is rational to act on principle, nor would be happy, I imagine, with Downs's theory either as moral or political prescription, or as political psychology. I make the additional claim for my hypothesis that it shows that some people, without irrationality or inconsistency, could participate under some conditions and not under others.

Values, roles, and a sense of duty

Though inclined to accept my criticisms of instrumentalism, Ryan is sceptical of my alternative, preferring a far simpler account of why people turn out to vote. They have, he suggests, a sense of duty, and so long as the cost does not rise above a certain threshold they do not question its prescriptions. And the more important the issues the greater the sense of obligation, and presumably the higher the threshold.

Now if we take the phrase 'a sense of duty' strictly literally, this account will not show voting to be rational; nor will it explain the widespread conviction that there are reasons for voting. For why is doing what one is prompted to do by one's sense of duty any more rational than laughing when prompted by one's sense of humour? Both seem neither rational nor irrational but nonrational. Such an account would be consistent with the crudest subjective intuitionism: confronted with conditions \(C, A\) gets the feeling he has to vote, so he votes. Or in a concentration camp, he feels (or senses) that he has to defy the guards, so he does. Now some people may indeed behave like that, and be incapable of giving any rational account of themselves afterwards. But the account certainly fails to meet Wollheim's conditions for a theory that rationalises political action.

By contrast, I claim for my solution the merit of meeting Wollheim's conditions. It postulates an ordering
of role-preference orderings related to the principles acknowledged as one’s own. When the issues at stake in politics affect one’s principles in an important degree, the ordering of roles assigns to action in one’s political role a high priority, so that one’s interpretation of one’s duty in that situation is that one should act politically. One may well have duties by virtue of this role in other situations too, but if they touch one’s principles at less sensitive points one may well assign a higher preference to the duties (i.e. to the role-preferences) of some other role. And this would be perfectly consistent with one’s total set of principles, what Hollis is disposed to call one’s social identity (a term I like well enough, though I am unsure what work the adjective is supposed to do).

But perhaps I am taking Ryan’s expression ‘a sense of duty’ too literally. His reference to a person who does not ‘question the cost of his social duties’ so long as he thinks he is paying only ‘his fair share of time and effort’ suggests that he really has in mind someone concerned to act fairly, to do his bit to make favoured institutions work.\(^\text{11}\) Now it is not obvious that, in the absence of independent moral postulates, a concern for fairness is itself a requirement of rationality as such. At any rate, Ryan does not claim that it is. Admittedly someone following Rawls would say that persons in ‘the original position’ would have a reason to favour the cultivation of such a concern; but that will not provide a reason for someone not in that position to adopt fairness as one of his own principles. One must simply accept it as given, therefore, that Ryan’s citizen is concerned to act on that principle, as the morally responsible person of my theory cares about acting for the sake of freedom and justice. In this respect Ryan and I are in the same boat; neither of us provides conclusive reasons for acknowledging these principles as one’s own.

The relations between these principles and voting are not, however, the same. Supposing it unlikely that an individual’s act could make the crucial difference to the outcome, it would be rational for my citizen to
participate nonetheless because his avowed principles are appropriately and conventionally expressed in this way. Ryan's citizen's reason would be more direct. If he recognised, with Bunce, that 'the waters from all the countries is what makes the ocean', and if he believed that others like himself should favour some state of affairs, then his concern for fairness might commit him to participate alongside others in trying to bring it about by whatever form of action would be effective if widely practised. Not that his own action would be instrumentally rational on that account — for I have postulated that its marginal effect would be negligible. Its rationality would consist in its being required by the principle that he acknowledges — in this instance one that commits him to doing whatever he would wish that everyone would do to bring about the desired state. Or rather, it would be required of him provided there was reason to expect that enough people would do it to give reasonable chance of success. For a person who claimed to care about the survival of a democratic system could not be accused of acting unfairly if he did nothing towards it, if hardly anyone else did anything either. The obligation of fairness seems to presuppose some degree of reciprocity. People who care only about fairness are thus exonerated when others defect. By contrast, someone who cares about liberty, human rights, or justice (in a sense broader than fairness) has a less conditional commitment. Whether others go along will not affect it, any more than will the absence of directly effective forms of instrumental action. For there are conventional ways of manifesting concern for principles irrespective of other people. The only way to show that one cares about fairness, however, is to do one's bit in collaboration with others.

Both Ryan's account and my own will rationalise some voting behaviour by drawing on a notion of non-instrumental rationality, even though his relies specifically on a concern for fairness where I am prepared to include a broader range of principles. Since both
accounts show only that there could be reasons for voting that are not instrumental, there is no need at the level of theory construction to choose between them. One account may fit some voters, another may fit others; the important point is that both invoke a notion of rationality to meet cases where instrumental rationality will clearly not do the trick. Of course, neither can rule out the further possibility that some voters do not vote for reasons at all, but just out of habit or because they respond to other people's cues.

One consequence of the difference in stress between Ryan's account and my own is that I can rationalise apparently quixotic acts, like concentration camp protests, that escape his net. For the prisoners who do not protest, despite their principles, are not lacking in fairness; they simply lack the courage of their convictions that other more heroic protesters possess.

Interestingly, Ryan and I both use a threshold-type notion. But mine works in the reverse direction from his. According to his account, a person is moved by his sense of duty to act politically unless the cost rises above a certain threshold, the level of which varies with the importance of the issue. For me, a person will be disposed not to act politically unless either he enjoys being part of the political scene, or the issue stirs a principled concern sufficient to give political action a degree of priority over other action preferred by other roles. Because the opportunity cost of voting is generally low (as Barry has pointed out), and because in some democracies at least the choice of governments is widely believed to have important principled consequences, in general elections, for very many electors, the threshold where the voting role takes over will commonly be crossed. In local elections, however, many more people abstain. Ryan would say, I suppose, that in these cases the threshold beyond which a voter starts to question his social duties is so low that the sense of duty — or fairness — that is ordinarily sufficient to move him in general elections is here inhibited by the cost, even though this is no greater
in local than in general elections, and is, in any case, very low. According to my account, the principled concerns which motivate him in general elections are not stirred in local elections, and other role-preferences — or his personal preference-ordering — take priority over them.

Wollheim asks whether my revised account of the rationality of participation 'junks' the social action schema. It does not. On the contrary, the notion of an ordering of preference orderings (an identity or acknowledged way of life) which in a particular situation generates a preference for an action deriving from the role preferred as appropriate to that situation, is clearly central to my thesis. What I have discarded is the simple decision-theory instrumental model which was my point of departure. I admit (pp. 12-13) that my more complex model lacks the heuristic attractions for political science of the simpler one. Nevertheless it provides a way of interpreting as rational not only action which cannot be accounted for instrumentally, but, under different conditions, abstention too. For we need to account not only for voting in general elections, and abstention in local ones, but also for non-participation in constituency politics, trade union elections, and so on. Most of the time other things are just more important. Then, at the other extreme, my model accounts for the instrumentally-pointless act of dedication under conditions where the issues are so important that making manifest one's political principles overrides all else.

I cling to the notion of a civic (or political) role, then, because it enables me to say that A acknowledges his obligation *qua* citizen to do *x*, but rationally sets it aside in favour of something more important in *that situation*. Some men in Lucius Junius Brutus's situation would have put being a father before the civic role in the exercise of which he sentenced his sons to death. What should one do if one finds out that one's brother or one's friend is a terrorist? Wollheim's apparent preference for an analysis in terms of 'commitment to certain values' overlooks that we may be committed to a number of values that point us
in different directions, according to the moral standpoint or role from which we survey our moral dilemma. To the extent that we have a coherent set of principles, we have a way of settling which of our possible role-obligations is to be preferred. It is not only, then, that having a political principle one has a commitment to act in a certain way; it is also that though one has it, one does not always have to act on it; for it does not exhaust one’s identity. One’s identity is not constituted by any single role, nor by any single principle with the commitments it carries for a given set of roles; it consists in the coherence of a second-order preference structure, and one’s disposition to act on that.

I cannot accept, therefore, Wollheim’s way of using the distinction between criticising someone as a soldier and criticising him tout court — as a man. If I criticise a soldier for running away, it is because he is not doing his duty as a soldier which, as a man, he ought in this case to do. But if I deplored the war, I might very well condemn him for not running away, thinking the worse of him for giving priority to his military duty in this situation. Why should I not say the same of a man qua citizen? Bunce took the view that his duty qua citizen was to demonstrate in favour of the ballot, and that this overrode his duties qua husband and father to stay safely at home. Mrs Bunce thought he had got his priorities wrong, as wives (in times past, at any rate) have often thought about the priority their husbands assigned to their dangerous political commitments. Finn’s view, perhaps, was that Bunce was confused about his duty ‘as a respectable citizen’ which, so far from conflicting with his roles of husband and father, required him no less than they to stay safely at home. But Finn did not share Bunce’s strong principled belief in the ballot.

Wollheim supposes (pp. 27-8) that I would want to establish that the abstentionist who thinks of himself as a citizen, but who thinks it a waste of time for citizens to get mixed up in democratic politics, is irrational. But this is by no means necessarily the case. Suppose the
abstentionist understands perfectly well the kind of obligations or role-preferences being a citizen entails. If ever he felt called upon to act qua citizen he would know what he was committed to. But if he cared very little for any principle or value ordinarily involved in politics, but cared only, for instance, for the ballet, his civic role-preference would rarely be cued-in. Still it would be irrational for him not to bother to vote against a party that, like the puritans of seventeenth century England, proposed to ban dancing. But I am far from arguing that everyone who acknowledges the role of citizen has a reason for having a second-order ranking of roles that would always assign high priority to political action. I say only that someone having politically relevant principles will be living in a happy time if he does not find that on some occasions he has a reason for acting politically, and ceteris paribus would be failing in rationality were he not to do so.

Of course, one may criticise the a-political balletomane as a pretty irresponsible type; we may criticise him, as Wollheim says, as a man. But that would be to make a substantive criticism of his second-order preference ordering — to say that he is morally defective for not caring about things he ought to care about. I have already confessed my inability to determine satisfactorily whether that kind of moral defect can also be shown to be a defect of rationality. Hollis clearly thinks it can be, and I should like to think that it is. But I have only weak arguments for saying it is.

I have taken no account so far of an objection from both Wollheim and Hollis that the role of citizen on which I rely so heavily does not exist. This puzzles me: there must be a misunderstanding about what constitutes a role. I agree of course with Hollis that 'a role-theory which supplies a role for every socially significant action explains 'nothing' (p. 49). My incautious and elliptical invocation of the role of darts player was meant to refer not to someone who knew how to play and occasionally played; I had in mind a member of a team, who played
regularly at his pub with a group who therefore had legitimate expectations of his behaviour. A darts player in this sense would be failing in role-performance if he turned up late for a match because he took time off to vote. An aficionado might criticise him ‘as a man’, for not putting first things first.

Why, then, should there not be a civic role? Does our political culture ask nothing of individuals in their public capacity? The Roman Republic had a very clear notion of a citizen’s role and took Cato and Brutus as paradigm performers. The Athenians distinguished those who were active in their civic role from others who had the status but lived ‘idiotic’ lives. I do not think we have altogether lost this understanding. Acting in one’s civic role is surely what we do when we act ‘public spiritedly’. I mean more by this, of course, than Pateman’s helping old gentlemen across roads (p. 57). That is a manifestation of benevolence, not of public spirit. My reference to Voltaire (p. 15) makes that distinction, at least implicitly. Obvious and specific instances of manifesting public spirit would be voting, not evading jury service, not using tax dodges that sail close to the wind, maintaining an interest in public affairs, and in the spirit of Harold Wilson’s ‘social contract’, helping the economy by deciding not to press for wage increases. In wartime Britain it meant volunteering for ARP and Home Guard duties. They act like good citizens who do their bit. And I take it that a ‘good citizen’ is one whose second-order preference-ordering (unlike that of Epictetus or the hippies) places the role of citizen (i.e. performing public spirited acts) very high much of the time.

Pateman, while not disputing that a civic role could exist, argues not merely that liberal theory leaves no room for one (an objection I have already repudiated (see pp. 73-5) ), but that the liberal democratic practice does not ‘provide an adequate basis for the actual development of a “political self” ’, a term I have used myself in this Rejoinder (p. 63). I suspect, however, that Pateman and I mean rather different things by it.
Pateman asserts that the liberal democratic political culture encourages a "private citizen" . . . to see her life as a collection of fragmented, competing, and separate "interests" to which political activity has only marginal relevance," which does not contribute "to the building of a political self" (p. 58). Now it is certainly true that liberal democratic culture recognises that someone may have very diverse interests, and that some of these may compete with others, in the sense that acting in accordance with one of his acknowledged roles he may be unable to do what another requires of him. My account of an ordering of preference orderings, constituting one's identity or way of life, was designed, however, to show that this need not be fragmentary; on the contrary, I presented a sketch of a morally responsible person whose achievement was that he had made of it a coherent whole. His principles — the things he believes important — 'cue in' his roles and his role-preferences in a complex but consistent way. Now for me, the civic role is admittedly one among others; when or whether it is 'cued in' will depend in part on the conditions in which a person finds himself, in part on the set of principles by which he orders his roles. For some, principles that demand active attention to politics rate high; these I have called participationists. But there are other people — I suggested a balletomane, but a religious mystic may illustrate the point better — who rate political action and political principles as relatively unimportant, whose civic role is rarely 'cued in'. They too have 'political selves' as I understand that term. They may know very well what they think about public affairs, they understand their civic role — but they attach little importance to these matters most of the time, believing that only rarely do they warrant diverting attention from higher spiritual concerns.

Pateman's criticism of my theory amounts to this: I have overlooked that liberal democracy does not encourage the development of persons with sets of principles tending to 'cue-in' political participatory
action as a general thing. And I imagine that only role-preference orderings of that kind count for Pateman as political selves. For her the adjective is a way of characterising a certain kind of person; for me it is a way of referring to just one aspect of any person, the importance of which in his total way of life will vary from one person to another. Accordingly, it would not be a source of incoherence in my theory of participation if liberal democracy failed to generate a very high level of political concern, provided it generated enough to get a lot of people to the polls who had no specifically personal reasons for going. And that, as Barry and Ryan have pointed out, does not need a very high level. However, if Pateman could demonstrate that mass participation in the liberal democratic forms can make no significant contribution towards the realisation of the principles and ideals which, I have claimed, are conceptually and standardly connected with such action, she would have undermined the tentative claim of the final paragraph of my paper that there is a functional rationality in the conceptual scheme that links voting with the manifestation of political principles. But she would not have shown that anyone embracing these principles, and seeing no more effective course of action available to him, would be irrational to manifest his principles by voting. Indeed, that seems to be precisely her own view, when she defends the action of the person who 'wishes to act "democratically" ', but who, lacking middle-class education, skills and confidence, doesn’t know what else to do (p. 56).

The descriptive adequacy of my account

In sticking to the social action schema I will have disappointed Wollheim, who doubts whether such an account can ‘lay claim to descriptive adequacy’, because, I suppose, he thinks people do not see issues in that way. A theory that would both account for and ‘rationalise’ political participation must capture, says Wollheim, the
conceptualisations and the arguments that determine or regulate behaviour; it is not enough that they be observationally adequate. I take this to be an instance of what Barry rejects — a ‘purist’ demand that such a theory must ‘account for the actor’s behaviour in terms that he himself would recognise’ (p. 41). I am inclined to agree with Barry that there are some kinds of explanation that need not satisfy this condition. But if, as with the theories discussed in my paper, the aim is to explain what occurs as ‘rational’, Wollheim’s condition surely must be satisfied. Otherwise one would have to say, as some economists do, that people behave ‘as if’ they were rational. But while accounts of ‘as if rational’ behaviour may generate useful, even verified, predictions, they cannot ultimately explain phenomena, nor account for the reliability of the predictions they generate. For unless these people really were rational, one would be left wondering at the extraordinary coincidence of their regularly behaving as if they were. I feel bound, therefore, to accept Wollheim’s challenge. An account of a person’s action as rational must be one that, were he honest with himself, he would recognise and acknowledge.

But what stands in the way of someone’s acknowledging my social action schema as a formal conceptualisation of his own decision experience? Of course, he would not have in his mind a map of his preference structure labelled as I have labelled it; but is it so improbable that someone should see himself as committed by his principles to complying with the requirements of one of his acknowledged roles rather than another? I am not claiming that all participatory action and abstention can be adequately explained as rational using my social action schema. There are people no doubt who avow principles but do not act on them, not because other roles are cued in by their other principles but because they are careless or self-indulgent. Perhaps we should say of them at least that they have no real principles. Or consider the trade union member who
complains bitterly about corruption or injustice in union administration but has never been to a branch meeting or cast a vote for the executive. Should we not be justified in calling him irrational for doing nothing, while making a fuss which acknowledges that with his professed principles he has reason enough for action? I have, in short, no way of telling how much political activity and apathy that slips through the instrumentalist net will be caught in the finer meshes of my own. It seems worth while pointing out, however, that there are a number of forms of action that I can rationalise which alternative schemata cannot.

On giving aid and comfort to the radical chic

I do not share Barry's belief that a political philosopher should be trying to knock the props out from under the self-esteem of 'the beautiful people', 'the radical chic', rather than rationalising it. Their self-esteem is not our concern. Our job is to assess the rationality of forms of actions, applying such notions of rationality as seem to be current and available to us. If certain distasteful forms turn out to be rational enough, using concepts of rationality necessary for making sense of other forms of action that it would be unacceptable to exclude, it surely wouldn't do to stiffen the requirements for the express purpose of excluding the ones we didn't care for.

Barry castigates 'the radical chic' for frivolity. On my account someone would count as frivolous if (a) there being a form of action that manifested some important principle and promised good consequences and outraged no other important principle, he preferred a form of action that was only expressive. And I should certainly consider that irrational — I am not against acting for the sake of good consequences. Or (b), he may attach importance to ideals that are trivial and then act with strict formal rationality consistently with them. This would be a case of substantive irrationality, supposing there are ways of justifying the charge. Or (c), he may
act for the sake of the satisfaction of believing that he has acted for the sake of a principle. This is a case of narcissistic bad faith, and since it is incoherent as a motive, it must surely be irrational. I have tried to distinguish this case from one of acting non-instrumentally on principle. The CND radicals may have been at fault in all of these ways — or in none of them; but to those that were at fault my paper should give no comfort.

But my analysis was intended to rationalise not only relatively costless acts like voting, and somewhat more costly ones like political demonstrations, but also ones that are very costly indeed, like the acts of defiance of the forgotten martyrs of the concentration camps. Barry needs to take care that in refusing the cachet of rationality to the frivolous he does not deny it at the same time to the most courageous albeit the most consequentially pointless manifestations of the human spirit.

NOTES
1 I have made timid moves in this direction in 'Freedom, autonomy, and the concept of a person', Aristotelian Society Proceedings, 1975-6, LXXVI. I do not think I can usefully attempt more in the present discussion. But see also S. I. Benn and G. W. Mortimore, 'Can ends be rational? The methodological implications' in S. I. Benn and G. W. Mortimore (eds.), Rationality and the Social Sciences, London, 1976.
2 I am adopting Wollheim's use of 'rationalisation', not Freud's.
3 My use of 'ritualistic' seems to have been particularly offensive. If English usage limits 'ritualistic' to empty rituals, as Barry suggests, then I plead guilty to misuse of the word. It must be clear, however, from the whole of sec. V that that could not be the meaning intended.
5 The case of the voters of Peyrane (p. 48, n. 5) is interesting in this connection. Viewed from the standpoint of the functional
rationality of a democratic system, their conduct is certainly pathological. But it would not necessarily be so, given Olson's account of the difficulties of providing collective goods. It may not be personally rational (in Downs's sense) for any particular person to organise collective opposition; so there is no vehicle available for rational consequentialist action. Someone has to care deeply to make the sacrifices and accept the risks of leadership. Till then, the rest express their frustration and their attachment to justice in the only way open to them — by psephical cursing.


8 Ibid., p. 106.


11 Views expressed to me by Ryan in personal correspondence after he had seen a first draft of this Rejoinder have led me to think that this is indeed what he meant, and to insert the passage that follows in reply.

12 I doubt whether Green, Bradley, or Bosanquet would have been satisfied with this. But maybe Pateman would not count them as liberals.