Raymond Williams

Keywords

A vocabulary of culture and society

Revised edition

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York
For Kirsti, Annika, David and Rosalind
language, the range and complexity of sense and reference indicate both difference of intellectual position and some blurring or overlapping. These variations, of whatever kind, necessarily involve alternative views of the activities, relationships and processes which this complex word indicates. The complexity, that is to say, is not finally in the word but in the problems which its variations of use significantly indicate.

It is necessary to look also at some associated and derived words. Cultivation and cultivated went through the same metaphorical extension from a physical to a social or educational sense in C17, and were especially significant words in C18. Coleridge, making a classical C19 distinction between civilization and culture, wrote (1830): 'the permanent distinction, and occasional contrast, between cultivation and civilization'. The noun in this sense has effectively disappeared but the adjective is still quite common, especially in relation to manners and tastes. The important adjective cultural appears to date from the 1870s; it became common by the 1890s. The word is only available, in its modern sense, when the independent noun, in the artistic and intellectual or anthropological senses, has become familiar. Hostility to the word culture in English appears to date from the controversy around Arnold's views. It gathered force in C19 and C20, in association with a comparable hostility to aesthete and aesthetic (q.v.). Its association with class distinction produced the mime-word culcha. There was also an area of hostility associated with anti-German feeling, during and after the 1914–18 War, in relation to propaganda about Kultur. The central area of hostility has lasted, and one element of it has been emphasized by the recent American phrase culture-vulture. It is significant that virtually all the hostility (with the sole exception of the temporary anti-German association) has been connected with uses involving claims to superior knowledge (cf. the noun intellectual), refinement (culcha) and distinctions between 'high' art (culture) and popular art and entertainment. It thus records a real social history and a very difficult and confused phase of social and cultural development. It is interesting that the steadily extending social and anthropological use of culture and cultural and such formations as sub-culture (the culture of a distinguishable smaller group) has, except in certain areas (notably popular entertainment), either bypassed or effectively diminished the hostility and its associated unease and embarrass-

ment. The recent use of culturalism, to indicate a methodological contrast with structuralism in social analysis, retains many of the earlier difficulties, and does not always bypass the hostility.

See aesthetic, anthropology, art, civilization, folk, development, humanity, science, western

---

**DEMOCRACY**

Democracy is a very old word but its meanings have always been complex. It came into English in C16, from Fw démocratie, F, demokratia, mL - a translation of demokratia, Gk, from rw demos - people, kratos - rule. It was defined by Elyot, with specific reference to the Greek instance, in 1531: 'an other publique weal was amonge the Atheniensis, where equalitie was of astate among the people ... This manner of governaunce was called in greke Democratia, in latine, Populairis potestia, in englisshe the rule of the comminaltie.' It is at once evident from Greek uses that everything depends on the senses given to people and to rule. Ascribed and doubtful early examples range from obeying 'no master but the law' (? Solon) to 'of the people, by the people, for the people' (? Cleon). More certain examples compare 'the insolence of a despot' with 'the insolence of the unbridled commonalty' (cit. Herodotus) or define a government as democracy 'because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many'; also, 'all that is opposed to despotic power, has the name of democracy' (cit. Thucydides) or define a government as democracy 'because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many'; also, 'all that is opposed to despotic power, has the name of democracy' (cit. Thucydides). Aristotle (Politics, IV, 4) wrote: 'a democracy is a state where the freemen and the poor, being in the majority, are invested with the power of the state'. Yet much depends here on what is meant by 'invested with power': whether it is
ultimate sovereignty or, at the other extreme, practical and unshared rule. Plato made Socrates say (in Republic, VIII, 10) that 'democracy comes into being after the poor have conquered their opponents, slaughtering some and banishing some, while to the remainder they give an equal share of freedom and power'.

This range of uses, near the roots of the term, makes any simple derivation impossible. It can, however, be said at once that several of these uses – and especially those which indicate a form of popular class rule – are at some distance from any orthodox modern 'Western' definition of democracy. Indeed the emergence of that orthodox definition, which has its own uncertainties, is what needs to be traced. 'Democracy' is now often traced back to medieval precedents and given a Greek authority. But the fact is that, with only occasional exceptions, democracy, in the records that we have, was until C19 a strongly unfavourable term, and it is only since IC19 and eC20 that a majority of political parties and tendencies have united in declaring their belief in it. This is the most striking historical fact.

Aquinas defined democracy as popular power, where the ordinary people, by force of numbers, governed – oppressed – the rich; the whole people acting like a tyrant. This strong class sense remained the predominant meaning until IC18 and eC19, and was still active in mC19 argument. Thus: 'Democracy, when the multitude have government', Fleming (1576) (for the class sense of multitude see masses); 'democratic, where free and poor men being the greater number, are lords of the estate' (1586); 'democracy ... nothing else than the power of the multitude', Filmer, Patriarcha (1680). To this definition of the people as the multitude there was added a common sense of the consequent type of rule: a democracy was a state in which all had the right to rule and did actually rule; it was even contrasted (e.g. by Spinoza) with a state in which there was rule by representatives, including elected representatives. It was in this sense that the first political constitution to use the term democracy – that of Rhode Island in 1641 – understood it: 'popular government; that is to say it is in the power of the body of freemen orderly assembled, or a major part of them, to make or constitute just Laws, by which they will be regulated, and to depute from among themselves such ministers as shall see them faithfully executed between man and man'.

This final clause needs to be emphasized, since a new meaning of democracy was eventually arrived at by an alteration of the practice here indicated. In the case of Rhode Island, the people or a major part of them made laws in orderly assembly; the ministers 'faithfully executed' them. This is not the same as the representative democracy defined by Hamilton in 1777. He was referring to the earlier sense of democracy when he observed that 'when the deliberative or judicial powers are vested wholly or partly in the collective body of the people, you must expect error, confusion and instability. But a representative democracy, where the right of election is well secured and regulated, and the exercise of the legislative and judicial authorities is vested in select persons ... etc.' It is from this altered American use that a dominant modern concept of democracy developed. Bentham formulated a general sense of democracy as rule by the majority of the people, and then distinguished between 'direct democracy' and 'representative democracy', recommending the latter because it provided continuity and could be extended to large societies. These important practical reasons have since been both assumed and dropped, so that in mC20 an assertion of democracy in the Rhode Island sense, or in Bentham's direct sense, could be described as 'anti-democratic', since the first principle of democracy is taken to be rule by elected representatives. The practical arguments are of course serious, and in some circumstances decisive, but one of the two most significant changes in the meaning of democracy is this exclusive association with one of its derived forms, and the attempted exclusion of one of its original forms; at one period, its only form.

The second major change has to do with interpretation of the people. There is some significant history in the various attempts to limit 'the people' to certain qualified groups: freemen, owners of property, the wise, white men, men, and so on. Where democracy is defined by a process of election, such limited constitutions can be claimed to be fully democratic: the mode of choosing representatives is taken as more important than the proportion of 'the people' who have any part in this. The development of democracy is traced through institutions using this mode rather than through the relations between all the people and a form of government. This interpretation is orthodox in most accounts of the development of English democracy. Indeed democracy is said to have been 'extended' stage by stage, where what is meant is clearly the right to
vote for representatives rather than the old (and until eC19 normal English) sense of popular power. The distinction became critical in the period of the French Revolution. Burke was expressing an orthodox view when he wrote that 'a perfect democracy' was 'the most shameless thing in the world' (Reflections on the Revolution in France, 1790) for democracy was taken to be 'uncontrolled' popular power under which, among other things, minorities (including especially the minority which held substantial property) would be suppressed or oppressed. Democracy was still a revolutionary or at least a radical term to mC19, and the specialized development of representative democracy was at least in part a conscious reaction to this, over and above the practical reasons of extent and continuity.

It is from this point in the argument that two modern meanings of democracy can be seen to diverge. In the socialist tradition, democracy continued to mean popular power; a state in which the interests of the majority of the people were paramount and in which these interests were practically exercised and controlled by the majority. In the liberal tradition, democracy meant open election of representatives and certain conditions (democratic rights, such as free speech) which maintained the openness of election and political argument. These two conceptions, in their extreme forms, now confront each other as enemies. If the predominant criterion is popular power in the popular interest, other criteria are often taken as secondary (as in the People's Democracies) and their emphasis is specialized to 'capitalist democracy' or 'bourgeois democracy'. If the predominant criteria are elections and free speech, other criteria are seen as secondary or are rejected; an attempt to exercise popular power in the popular interest, for example by a General Strike, is described as anti-democratic, since democracy has already been assured by other means; to claim economic equality (q.v.) as the essence of democracy is seen as leading to 'chaos' or to totalitarian democracy or government by trade unions. These positions, with their many minor variants, divide the modern meanings of democracy between them, but this is not usually seen as historical variation of the term; each position, normally, is described as 'the only true meaning', and the alternative use is seen as propaganda or hypocrisy.

Democratic (from eC19) is the normal adjective for one or other of these kinds of belief or institution. But two further senses should be noted. There is an observable use of democratic to describe the conditions of open argument, without necessary reference to elections or to power. Indeed, in one characteristic use freedom of speech and assembly are the 'democratic rights', sufficient in themselves, without reference to the institution or character of political power. This is a limiting sense derived from the liberal emphasis, which in its full form has to include election and popular sovereignty (though not popular rule) but which often opposes sustained democratic activity, such as challenges to an elected leader or his policies on other than formal or 'appropriate' occasions. There is also a derived sense from the early class reference to the 'multitude'; to be democratic, to have democratic manners or feelings, is to be unconscious of class distinctions, or consciously to disregard or overcome them in everyday behaviour: acting as if all people were equal, and deserved equal respect, whether this is really so or not. Thus a man might be on 'plain and natural' terms with everyone he met, and might further believe in free speech and free assembly, yet, following only these senses, could for example oppose universal suffrage, let alone government directed solely to the interests of the majority. The senses have in part been extended, in part moved away, from what was formerly and is probably still the primary sense of the character of political power. Meanwhile demagogy and demagogie, fw demagogos, Gk, rw demos—people, agogos—leader, agein—lead, carried from the Greek the predominantly unfavourable sense, of 'irresponsible agitator' rather than 'popular leader', in a familiar kind of political prejudice. It was used similarly in English from C17, and cf. agitator, first used in the sense of 'agent' by soldiers' delegates in the Parliament of 1647–9, but given its derogatory sense mainly from C18.

No questions are more difficult than those of democracy, in any of its central senses. Analysis of variation will not resolve them, though it may sometimes clarify them. To the positive opposed senses of the socialist and liberal traditions we have to add, in a century which unlike any other finds nearly all political movements claiming to stand for democracy or real democracy, innumerable conscious distortions: reduction of the concepts of election, representation and mandate to deliberate formalities or merely manipulated forms; reduction of the concept of popular power, or government in the popular interest, to nominal slogans covering the rule of a bureaucracy or an oligarchy. It would sometimes be easier to believe
in democracy, or to stand for it, if the C19 change had not happened and it were still an unfavourable or factional term. But that history has occurred, and the range of contemporary sense is its confused and still active record.

See anarchism, class, common, equality, liberal, masses, popular, representative, revolution, socialist, society

Determine has a complex range of meanings in modern English, and within this range there is a special difficulty when the verb is associated with determinant, determinism and a particular use of determined. This special difficulty is important because it bears on several significant tendencies in modern thought.

Determine came into English in C14 from fw determiner, of, determinare, L, rw terminare, L - to set bounds to. Several formations with the Latin prefix de are complicated in meaning, but in this case the sense of 'setting bounds' is dominant in all early uses. The difficulty and the later ambiguity arose when one of the applied senses, that of putting a limit and therefore an end to some process, acquired the significance of an absolute end. There are many processes with an ordinary limit or end, for which determine and its derivatives have been regularly used: a question or dispute is determined by some authority, and from this use, and the associated legal use in matters like leases, there is a more general sense which is equivalent to 'decide': e.g. 'on a date to be determined'. Associated with this is the sense which is equivalent to 'settle'; fixing by observation, calculation or definition. What is distinct about all these uses is that determining is some fixed point or act at the end of a process, and that this sense carries with it no necessary implication, and usually no implication at all, that the specific character of the ultimate decision or settlement or conclusion is inherent in the nature of the process. Determination resolves or completes a process; it does not prospectively control or predict it.

Yet clearly there is a possible overlap with the sense of a process so conditioned that its eventual or foreseeable determination can be held to define it. It is from this overlap that all the difficult modern senses derive. The main source of this emphasis is theological: God can be held (in a sense extended from the specific decision by an authority) to have determined the conditions of human life, including the inevitability of death, and in this sense to have determined human destiny. From eC16, for example in Tyndale, we have the scriptural 'determinat counsell and foreknowledge of God'. There were of course prolonged and intricate arguments about the degree and character of such pre-ordained ends, and about their implications and consequences. In general, in these arguments, predestination (with the qualifying free-will) was much more often used than determination, but at times the two words were clearly associated. This is the main source of determination as something absolutely settled or fixed, but the absolute sense never completely took over, even in this area of use. Yet there was, obviously, plenty of room for confusion as this argument moved between the senses of conditions defining a process and of a process conditioned by its foreseen or known end.

When determination began to be used in science, from mC17, a corresponding range was established. Determination was occasionally the final or fundamental state of some substance but in early physics (Boyle, 1660) it was in effect a definite tendency: 'others whose motion has an opposite determination'. Clarke in 1710 wrote: 'when a body moves any particular way, the Disposition that it has to move that way, rather than any other, is what we call its Determination'. Here the definite tendency is inherent in the character of the body, and thus the determinants of any process are still specific. It was in the subsequent formation of general laws, whether in science or, as earlier, in versions of the laws of God or of Nature, that the sense extended to an abstract principle: from a notion of specific effects and causes to a notion of 'inevitable' determined process. But it is very difficult, when this abstract sense has been reached, to make clear distinctions between versions of processes 'controlled' by some general law or laws and versions of consequence which, whether derived from some inherent or, as possibly, accidental element, are seen as inevitable. The difficulty is greatly increased when we realize that determine is used as often in prospect as in retrospect; the sense of inevitability which can be an