

# Inclusive democracy and its prospects\*

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**Abstract:** Takis Fotopoulos' inclusive democracy project has generated one of the most interesting and ambitious undertakings within contemporary political philosophy. Fotopoulos synthesises what he regards as the principal contributions of five discrete traditions, retrieves classical Athens as democratic exemplar, thinks through and extrapolates the implications of his vision for daily life, and seeks to anticipate and resolve conundrums likely to follow. Any one of these dimensions would render his project noteworthy. Nonetheless, his project occurs within a historic moment that limits its prospects of consideration beyond its own political constituency. However unfairly, Fotopoulos' proposals will struggle for mass attention for reasons not principally of his creation. A leading reason for this is the widespread and probably reasonable leeriness toward large-scale alternatives borne of the pathological nature of much twentieth century political radicalism.

## Introduction

This article is organised into two parts. Part I revisits Takis Fotopoulos' (1997) *Towards an Inclusive Democracy* and deploys the discursive and interlocutory device of seeking to anticipate the likely response of three political and intellectual constituencies. Part II locates Fotopoulos' project relative to the difficulties likely to confront any alternative politics early in the twenty-first century.

## Part I: Towards an Inclusive Democracy

Why has anarchism not attracted a greater following, especially given manifest failures of capital, the state and 'actually existing socialism'? The frequent scholarly response is not that anarchism cannot work but that its proponents have not demonstrated that it can, especially in societies of scale. Woodcock's classic (1971) study, *Anarchism*, concluded that, however principled, anarchist refusal to provide such detail had encouraged its limited support.<sup>[1]</sup> Takis Fotopoulos' *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*<sup>[2]</sup> fills in a number of these gaps, proposing with clarity, thoughtfulness and originality the key mechanisms that might enable and sustain such a polity. Fotopoulos' approach is not declaredly anarchist, presumably to navigate the widespread misperception of anarchism as chaos-advocating, and to synthesise and transcend liberal socialist, feminist, Green, and classical and contemporary autonomy/democracy insights. Anarchism seems nevertheless the most proximate formal category, given his radical decentralisation, direct democracy, municipalism and abolition of state, money and market economy.

Fotopoulos seeks "to show that the way out of the present multidimensional crisis can only be found from without rather than within the present institutional framework. The

ambition is to initiate a discussion concerning the need for a new liberatory project and the strategies for implementing it". He analyses economic, political, social and ecological problems, indicates consequent civilisational crises, and responds with a manifesto scarcely less ambitious than that of 1848. He contends that state socialism, market capitalism and liberal oligarchy all support the growth economy, false science and economics, the domination of people and concentration of power. All of this precipitates ecological, North-South and other crises. Market economies are inefficient; 'liberal democracy' is actually liberal oligarchy. Crises will increasingly pressure social democracy toward Thatcherite and American practices. He argues that the traditional political science distinction between direct and representative democracy is based upon a false premise. There are not multiple forms of democracy; "in the political realm there can only be one form of democracy, what we may call political or direct democracy, where political power is shared equally among all citizens...the self-instituting of society". Contemporary, atomised 'autonomy' would be unrecognisable to ancient Athenians, for whom it meant a synthesis of collective and individual determination. The legacy of Athenian democracy (594-427 BC) is that direct democracy is possible, and economic oligarchy and political democracy incompatible. Athenian democracy did not collapse, as some claim, due to inherent contradictions within democracy, but because inclusive democracy was not allowed to mature.

Fotopoulos reworks Castoriadis and Lefort; the choice today is barbarism or democracy. An inclusive democracy includes individual and collective decision-making, safeguards that ensure the rights of minorities, and a constellation of institutions and values with citizens socialised into its precepts via *paedeia* (the classical Athenian tradition of broadly-based, self-questioning civic education). The municipality is the most appropriate economic unit; inclusive democracy is possible today only at this level. A municipality must be sufficiently large for economic viability yet not so large as to undermine direct democracy. Thirty thousand members is perhaps the minimum; cities larger than this can comprise any number of these organisational units. He proposes "demotic (community) ownership", not nationalised or collectivised enterprises. Fotopoulos accepts scale, contemporary industrial techniques and a division of labour provided that domination is avoided. Municipalities may choose to confederate. Municipal self-reliance is supported, but autarky rejected. Trade between confederally united communities is acceptable and desirable once communities rather than markets control the exchange and thereby replace domination and dependency with mutual self-reliance and collective support. This will require a framework for confederated democratic processes as well as decisions at the regional, national and supra-national level.

Vouchers replace money; they are issued on a personal basis, unavailable for exchange or as a store of wealth. There are two categories of voucher, providing entitlement to basic and non-basic goods respectively. Allocation of resources occurs collectively via decisions at meetings and individually through voucher choices. Community assemblies establish policy and send rotating, recallable delegates to regional and confederal administrative councils; rotation prevents the emergence of a brahmin caste of professional politicians. Productive resources belong to the *demos*, leased through long-term contract to employees of an enterprise. Production is aimed not at growth but the satisfaction of basic needs; when these are satisfied, those desirous of non-basic goods may volunteer to work hours additional to the minimum agreed amount and receive non-basic vouchers. The community establishes an "index of desirability", ranking jobs relative to inherent capacity for satisfaction. Less satisfying jobs provide a slightly higher income of non-basic

vouchers. This will produce a certain amount of inequality, tolerable because small-scale and related to work voluntarily chosen. Where some communities enjoy natural endowments that others in their confederation do not, there should be a mechanism for cross-subsidisation. Barter and basic vouchers provide the medium of trade. If trading outside the federation or with countries still in a market economy, the form can be determined through bilateral or multilateral agreements. The transitional strategy develops small-scale, working models of democracy across numerous spheres, gradually forging alternate values and institutions. As they strengthen, there is a commensurate phasing out of existing institutions. Transition contains political and economic dimensions, toward a new kind of politics and a gradual shifting of labour, capital and land in favour of the new economy. Left reformers excoriated by Fotopoulos may recognise some of these transitional components; presumably he will respond that, unlike them, he has linked these elements meaningfully, pedagogically and toward an exit strategy.

Fotopoulos' purposes are proselytising as well as scholarly; his normative orientation renders it appropriate to consider what others will make of his proposals. If welfare capitalism contains three worlds, three others might be delineated in their treatment of its proposed alternatives. The first comprises critics of capitalism convinced that an alternative must be rendered workable; their question is which model offers most. This book warrants prominence in their deliberations. Fotopoulos enhances prospects of a broad base of progressive support by respectfully drawing upon a number of traditions. Like most anarchists since Kropotkin and Bakunin, he repudiates reformism as flawed from the outset. He balances this with a transitional period, reducing his vulnerability to millenarianism. His policy detail implicitly accepts difficult choices between competing virtues, and is thus refreshing. He avoids the tease of many critics of capitalism who conclude either with suggestions disproportionately minute relative to the problems identified, or the so-what final page 'the task now is to develop alternatives'. Fotopoulos deftly negotiates the highwire, providing specificity yet avoiding an excessively universal prescriptivism or a disenfranchising 'scientific' blueprint fixed in stone. His confederal inclusive democracy redresses a frequent gap in anarchism, how communities might relate and forge mechanisms for joint decision-making as required, yet avoid a *de facto* state.

The significance for anarchism of what Fotopoulos has attempted here is underscored by revisiting Woodcock's conclusion that at the heart of anarchism's political failure was the weakness of their practical proposals for the society that would follow...There was much honesty in their refusal to make elaborate blueprints...but their disinclination to attempt specific proposals led to their producing a vague and vapid vision of an idyllic society...achievement was indefinitely postponed until the millennial day of reckoning; it was a kind of revolutionary pie-in-the-sky and one was expected to fast until mealtime. For the anarchists who followed Bakunin and Kropotkin were political and social absolutists, and they displayed an infinite and consistent contempt for piecemeal reform...They believed that all such gains must be illusory, and that only in the anarchist millennium would the poor really better themselves...the anarchist movement failed to present an alternative to the state or the capitalist economy that lastingly convinced any large section of the world's population.<sup>[3]</sup>

While technical questions may be asked of Fotopoulos' model, its more profound problem is that few outside of the first constituency (those already opposed to capitalism) will seriously consider it until their prior concerns about all large-scale alternatives are

relieved. To imagine that they might be persuaded because Fotopoulos indicts what is, and offers a conceivably plausible alternative, would misrecognise these concerns. Responses will be historically mediated through the prism of high-modern engineering and state socialisms, notwithstanding anarchist contempt for the latter. Fotopoulos will be deemed a fellow traveller within the larger field of romanticism, redemptive politics and the belief in the possibility and desirability of radical reinvention of societies. Some will detect little difference from earlier socialist forms of Rousseauian optimism and the false consciousness two-step that foundationalises democracy only to discount the majoritarianism at least partially implicit in the persistence of capitalism and representative government. They will be apprehensive of one more grand scheme hell-bent on hitching the social project to Icarus and knowing what's best for others. They will suggest a formalism in Fotopoulos' confidence that the model works, irrespective of whether it works; Fotopoulos will respond by noting his extensive provision for early, small-scale trials. That he offers a transitional period and the absence of violence will likely be insufficient to surmount such concerns.

The second constituency comprises those indisposed to capitalism yet unconvinced by alternatives to date and exit ramps thereto. They locate capitalism and most of the alternatives proposed to it as equally generated within the logic and terms of modernity. They may ask whether modernity's civilisational conundrums can be resolved by shifting from the abode of one of its offspring to that of another. They may wonder if Fotopoulos uncritically replicates modernity's Enlightenment architectural aspirations for societies and even the human condition, and Romanticist over-investment in conversation, direct democracy, *paedeia* and the presumption of a free choice of polity independent of history, culture and political economy. They suspect that the critique of capitalism exists symbiotically with, even integral to, capitalism rather than as a concrete alternative patiently awaiting its moment. They wonder if the benefits of modernity generate its problems, our existences consequently a wry, semi-intractable Faustian pact, our homes betwixt Scylla and Charybdis. They may fear that Fotopoulos' model reprises the modern illusion - shared by capitalism and socialism alike - that it is possible to choose a future that provides gains without losses. This second constituency may wonder if his model assumes that order may be imposed upon life once mechanisms conducive to proper, rational conversation and deliberation are established.

This constituency may also indicate that they searched in vain for Weberian sensitivities. Fotopoulos would presumably respond that his Athenian components predate modernity, that his rejection of the growth economy is premised upon a repudiation of instrumental rationality, and that his entire project is anything but prone to Weber's suggestion of a growing inability in modernity to conceptualise ultimate ends. All true. Yet Weber and the Frankfurt School's sense of unintended, often paradoxical, consequences, such as hyper-rationalisation so thorough as to spawn generalised irrationality, might ultimately be seen as in the tradition of Greek tragedy, where fortunes are ultimately reversed. They may suggest, then, that Fotopoulos has drawn on only some parts of the Greek legacy that remains instructive, overlooking the fables that provide timeless insights into the human condition and its limitations, including the sense that hubris will always come unstuck. As well as the perennial Prometheus and aforementioned references to Icarus, Scylla and Charybdis, we can also recall Tantalus, son of Zeus, who was immersed in a lake up to his chin because he offended the gods. The waters receded whenever he sought to allay his thirst, only to return once he stopped trying. Branches overflowed with ripe fruit just above his head, similarly receding whenever he reached for them and returning whenever

he stopped.<sup>[4]</sup> He was tormented by this combination of unfulfilled thirst, hunger and anticipation. Extrapolated to daily life, we might say that life has a way of confounding our preferences. One can be 'tantalised' only to find one's heart's desire just out of reach; resisting this sometimes only worsens the consequences. How, then, do such Greek fables pertain to this discussion? For starters, given the mixed blessing that was the twentieth century, it is not enough to be well-intended. If asking a polity to embark on a new road, one will be required to demonstrate well before-the-fact that this road cannot possibly be the harbinger of disaster. Otherwise, the public response will surely be 'better the devil you know'.

This constituency may also suggest that Fotopoulos conceptualises community in a periodised, bucolic fashion that is especially dated given recent transformations in subjectivity and the rise and rise of communication unrelated to spatial proximity. (His response will observe that he encourages email and the internet; the option of casting preferences electronically addresses problems of scale, and renders direct democracy even more attractive and practicable.) They may allege that Fotopoulos duplicates the gap alleged of Callenbach's *Ecotopia*; how is the fragmented public sphere and subject of late capitalism reinvented as to possess sufficient desire and judgement to underpin a vibrant local and civic culture?<sup>[5]</sup> *Paedeia* may or may not produce such a citizen over time; in the interim, how or why would most experience the absence of its values and practices as deficit? This constituency may also wonder if his severity on Left reformers misrecognises that they do not claim deep solutions but merely the least objectionable of practicable choices. The juxtaposition of his model arrangements with their compromises may be unfair. They could wonder if vouchers will inadvertently reprise productivism and subsumptions of citizenship to productivity. They will fear that a city, region or country attempting Fotopoulos' model would be vulnerable to (putatively) 'democracy-defending' invasion by the armed forces of a major capitalist power intent on reinstating repatriated transnational corporations and investments and warning other polities off a similar road. Fotopoulos may in turn allege a cerebral, fatalistic passivity, an intellectual ambivalence and fair-minded measuredness so chronic as to be politically paralysing, and the effective abandonment of civic engagement and the most destitute despite formally supporting both.

The third constituency comprises those who effectively support the *status quo* - the apolitical, those gaining most from existing arrangements, those who regard capitalism or the state as net contributors to humanity, those who believe that, however paradoxical, collective wellbeing is best served by the pursuit of self-interest, and those comforted by liberal, republican and constitutional formulations that separate powers and formally enshrine the rule of law over that of people. This constituency will regard as definitionally adroit but unconvincing his avowed innocence of utopianism because his is a liberatory project and Left and Right critics are, with unsustainable policies, the real utopians. The third constituency may regard the state as a buffer against the 'problem of evil' and unintended consequences, despite sometimes manifesting each. State absence could generate a vacuum, providing malevolence/human nature especial opportunity without accountability or state-administered recourse. If the jury is out on whether evil is the consequence of nature, nurture or their interaction, many will regard the state as a hedge against the worst case and treat Fotopoulos' state-as-dominatrix as reductionist. Multiple, countervailing forms of power might protect against tyranny. Ironically, this is one of many reasons Fotopoulos supports direct democracy; he and this constituency concur in

abhorring domination, locating its sources and nature differently. Fotopoulos needs to rebut Hobbes, as well as Michels' and Pareto's suggestion that élites are likely to emerge in any form of social organisation, even in those committed to the absence of élites. In the interim, liberal and republican representative government will be embraced as a compromise position on human nature, with prescribed and proscribed powers deemed the less risky arrangement. Fotopoulos needs to respond to intimations, notably from Freud, totalitarianism, pogroms and popular wars, that collectivities and not only élites can support murderousness; this goes directly to why people might seek the rule of law with state-as-enforcer. His greatest problem could be that, after such traumas, many are circumspect about intensively trusting each other, and especially nervous of vulnerable, unpredictable or new arrangements. Fotopoulos will likely be incredulous if those thus persuaded do not object to neoliberal global capitalism and oligarchy on similar grounds.

Fotopoulos' discussion of Athenian checks and balances will mitigate some concerns. He notes, for example, rotation of the Council of Five Hundred after one year, and the capacity to annually vote to ostracise one dangerously powerful person. This constituency will nevertheless remain concerned about safeguards. What, for example, prevents a cabal from undertaking (the stateless equivalent of) a coup, seizing the voucher repository, distributing vouchers to enjoin any with weapons or substantial musculature to their cause, and banishing all democratic practice? Fotopoulos needs to satisfy as to how internal and external aggression is prevented or resolved; simply expressing his confidence in the assembly to develop appropriate means will revisit anxieties provoked by Marx's similar assurances. Many regard private property as a buffer for the individual and not simply a mechanism of domination; he will need to show that demotic ownership could not prove demonic. Fotopoulos will presumably be nonplussed that this constituency should impose such a rigorous burden of proof of oligarchy's impossibility upon him, while apparently nonchalant about its currently thick presence.

His position is invidious; without detail, a dreamy optimist; with it, deemed a dangerous social engineer. This renders all the more necessary the demonstration of interpenetrating ontologies upon which Fotopoulos' edifice rests. He tacitly claims that liberal individualism, oligarchy and the growth economy skew and atomise our nature. This constituency will require detail as to the degree of renunciation required in Fotopoulos' scarcity-accepting society. The historically minded in this constituency may detect resonances with Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty* (1846) and concur with Marx, for once, in his 1847 response, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. The middle class will be nervous; the destitute may require less evidence if they believe that they can scarcely fare worse. It is unclear if Fotopoulos appeals to our self-interest or selflessness; probably both, especially given his retrieval of Athenian syntheses of personal and collective self-interest. The prospects of renunciation's embrace will be mediated through contemporary, eudemonistic constructions of the good life that assume it to be found in the explicit pursuit of happiness and hedonism. Fotopoulos' implicit claim is that genuine happiness aggregates paradoxically, through repudiating its narcissistic, relentless pursuit and settling instead for a communitarianism that is subtly but deeply fulfilling over time, because built upon such substance as suitably human values and practices. Another ontology is whether one privileges a positive freedom to build sociality or a negative freedom from such a responsibility, opening in turn to questions of the appropriate deference the atom ought accord the molecule.

Notwithstanding transitional strategies, it is not clear how this model will be culturally attractive to people who do not share its values. If consumption is today part of identity construction in all western and some other countries, and if Fotopoulos proposes consumption's reinvention as peripheral, will not many anxiously anticipate becoming emperors without clothing, robbed of props, sources of conversation and personal expression, suddenly at risk of feeling or seeming boring or personality-free? However much there is a vacuum at its heart, modernity (including capitalism and the growth economy) is often deemed stimulating in a way that other cultural processes struggle to compete with. Speed, adrenalin, the new, hedonism and narcissism allure to an extent that Fotopoulos needs to respond to, for his tacit assumption is that their attractions fade in *demos*-directed communities saturated with the satisfactions of participation, connectedness and 'real' values instilled through *paedeia*. Yet however damaged, indigenous and traditional communities with substantive meaning systems and modes of transmission have throughout the twentieth century advanced similar propositions to their teenagers contemplating the big smoke, only to be saddened if home somehow paled. It may be that one could be better off if never exposed to global/American culture but, once one has been, arguably richer local meaning systems can be deemed pedestrian. Fotopoulos will insist that participation is exciting, sociable and meaning-giving, just as his model is commensurable with the metropole and its stimulations. However unjustly, many in rich countries will deem his vision a dour monasticism to which they do not hear a calling, preferring death by chocolate to death by meetings. So we are back to assumptions of *tabula rasa*, palimpsests and that people socialised into one culture could or would choose *en masse* a different culture if they experienced a foretaste through the transition strategy. *Per contra*, Fotopoulos might convince given that most today self-constitute as democrats; he is persuasive that his approach is infinitely more democratic than what is.

Many will fear that his economics would pauperise, levelling down when feasible to level up. They will point to Europe and East Asia to suggest that capitalism is history's most rapid poverty removalist, however crude, cruel and asymmetrically distributed are its costs and benefits. Some may allege two false premises, that capitalism necessarily means the growth economy which necessarily means anti-environmentalism, and that scarcity is compelled only if renewable resources and technologies cannot be developed. Capitalism is only now perceiving its self-interest in environmental solutions, and its capacity to resolve the ecological problems it generates may be currently indeterminate. However slowly, business decision-makers and farmers increasingly concede that altering their practices will allow people, the environment and enterprises to live for another day. Green technologies and even holidays ('eco-tourism') are increasingly deemed a form of value-adding, and premium-priced accordingly. Marketeers seem to be positioning themselves behind this emergent trend toward green products and processes, with greenness the product line currently furthest from market saturation. The environment may finally be embraced precisely because there is a buck in it. Given the prominence of the tertiary sector and intellectual property in the 'new economy', so long as profits grow it is conceivable that ever-greater extraction and *per capita* consumption of natural resources could prove a phase and not a necessary constituent of capitalism. Some will challenge Fotopoulos' environmentally-based rejection of the growth economy via such claims as those advanced by Hollander's (2003) *The Real Environmental Crisis: Why Poverty, Not Affluence, Is the Environment's Number One Enemy*.<sup>[6]</sup>

Constituencies two and three will share several concerns. They may regard Left crisis-talk

as tired given its historic propensities for slipperiness, reification, formalism, self-valorisation and wishful thinking. Again, Fotopoulos will be punished for that which precedes him. The horrors he identifies are largely so, yet it is not clear that representative government and capitalism are in crisis in a literal sense. To be sure, they ever-reinvent themselves in response to new pressures, and confront real problems and challenges not least from new social movements that are today frequently international in scale. Yet this arguably creates pressure to deliver on their rhetorical claims rather than compel their abandonment. Only two crises he identifies are indisputable, ecological and North-South. Other ontologies require explicit defence. Do most desire extensive participation, as direct democracy assumes? He presumes but does not demonstrate the proposition that to be apolitical is to be alienated from one's true nature, a temporary by-product of a dysfunctional society. This may be so - or another instance of natural human diversity. Some who deny politics as universal vocation will fear its colonisation of their life-world. The artist of relentless muse desperate to maximise every free hour and kilojoule of energy may ask why the specialisation permitted of every other endeavour cannot be allowed of politics, and insist upon guarantees constraining participation's intrusion. The role accorded *paedeia* may be regarded as reworking false consciousness, as if 'once correct inputs occur (culture, values, education), correct outputs (including preferences) will result'. This too may be so, but has a Skinnerian vulnerability. What next if, post-*paedeia* and post-capitalism, sociopaths, psychopaths and pro-capitalists continue to emerge? Notwithstanding Fotopoulos' provisions for minorities, iron-clad provisions would be required that guarantee the right to dissent and to referenda that reverse his policies, such as the right to vote to re-marketise. Whether embracing the minimal or enabling state, most conservatives and progressives concur that the state is uniquely situated to perform important tasks, however much they differ over which tasks. Refusing achievements of representative government and its bureaucracy will antagonise, seemingly oblivious to the magnitude of accomplishment relative to even less accountable predecessors, such as feudal serfdom, divine right, monarchy and slavery. One reason the state was embraced was to bring capitalism under a modicum of social control, especially after the Great Depression.

Fotopoulos' model may be deemed vulnerable to unintended consequences, partially because redemptive politics is. Social darwinism is probably integral to laissez-faire capitalism but might also be possible in anarchism-gone-awry, whereas social democracy may suggest lesser risk in this regard. In this optic, aiming for a lower level of freedom and justice might produce more of it than a purer model. Contemporary parlance might capture this idea with the zen aphorism that less is more. Similarly, confederated municipalities might inadvertently intensify contemporary, ethnically-driven micronationalisms. Socialists and others may suggest that socialist internationalism remains instructive in holding that warmongering will persist until community is conceptualised within a larger, not smaller, frame (and testosterone rendered more peripheral). Fotopoulos anticipates environmental crisis prompting questioning of economics and politics but plays as trump card that which could also prove joker or wild card. Especially given late twentieth century naturalisations of individualism, scarcity could atomise or tribalise just as it could socialise; *Lord of the Flies* was, one hopes, merely fictional. If crisis forces people to their senses, by this logic the Great Depression should have ended capitalism. That it did not illustrates a capacity of capitalism that he does not engage with, self-reinvention so as to survive and fight another day, whether engineered via conspiracy, compromise, consensus or systemic autopoeisis.



This is an erudite, elegant book, with a sophistication undiminished by its polemicism. It is a work of philosophical and empirical substance, affirming agency and human hope over domination. Its limitations are relative to its ambition rather than its achievements. Democracy was one of the most uttered ‘motherhood statements’ of the twentieth century. Yet citizens everywhere allege democratic deficits in their own and other polities. Whatever my other reservations, a richness and sincerity of democratic impulse animates Fotopoulos’ project, coursing through its veins. Irrespective of one’s politics, Fotopoulos’ explication of Athenian political practice and philosophy - aided by Castoriadis, Arendt and others - reveals the thinness of contemporary understandings of autonomy, freedom, democracy and deliberation. We return to early Athens, notwithstanding its anti-democratic contradictions, and it is always an interesting journey. Archaeologists and philologists of democracy will enjoy the company this book provides, say, Castoriadis (1991)<sup>[7]</sup>, Hansen (1991)<sup>[8]</sup> and Arnason and Murphy (2001).<sup>[9]</sup> Fotopoulos convinces that a no-state, no-money existence offers high returns but will not satisfy those who will regard it as simultaneously high-risk, and therefore excessively fraught. This is an important book, but unless the questions noted here are plausibly responded to, it is likely to persuade few beyond those already seeking an alternative to market and state.

## **Part II: Revisiting the Inclusive Democracy project**

My purpose in Part II is to consider Fotopoulos’ approach as indeed a politics and suggest that it may thus be contradistinguished from many other progressive undertakings. Let me commence with several caveats. It will already be apparent that I am doubtful about the prospects for several of Fotopoulos’ proposals, and ambivalent about some others. I cannot as a matter of empirical observation concur with Fotopoulos’ implicit argument that representative democracy, the state and reformism have generated nothing of value. My sense is that the efficacy of each varies, chronologically, across polities and relative to that which precedes them. What one finds rather depends upon what one looks at, where and when. Parenthetically, I am yet to settle upon the form of society I regard as optimally desirable and plausible. Notwithstanding various reservations, my purpose in Part II is to suggest several commendable dimensions of Fotopoulos’ project; it is less material here that I think some of it improbable.

I regard it as a positive and rare virtue that Fotopoulos tacitly adopts a First Principle approach to politics, in at least three respects. One, it is implicit that prior to writing, he has posed to himself such foundational questions as: what is the good life, and hence the good society? This indicates, of course, another sense in which his project might be seen as eminently Greek. Two, whatever other problems follow, it is surely to assert First Principles to, in effect, ask ‘what is a society that could instantiate my values?’, and to be undeterred if one’s conclusion has few antecedents. Political preferences ought be acts of anthropological creativity that assert human agency and, for that matter, Vico’s Principle. Three, expressed in First Principles, democracies need a vibrant public sphere, and the advocacy of a multiplicity of versions of the good life, around which conversations and policy preferences gradually crystallise. This is so (or at least ought be) whether one supports the case for representative government<sup>[10]</sup> or regards ‘representative democracy’ as oxymoronic, insisting instead with Fotopoulos that ‘democracy’ is necessarily a synonym for ‘direct democracy’. Every politics must contain prognosis (including strategy and detail), and not only diagnosis. The effective absence of the former is a principal reason why many forms of radicalism, especially those of Jacobinist hue, do not in truth constitute

a politics at all, but are rather closer to millenarian sects. It is not, as they believe, their misfortune that the polity rarely contemplates their views; rather, because they do not represent or offer a politics, this is not a possibility. To know what you are against but not what you are for is not a politics. That their advocates are oblivious to this, as they are to being walking advertisements against their own position, is immaterial. It is a monument to their self-deception that they often attribute their political marginality principally to the capacity of the status quo to enculturate and reify, and to thereby distort human values - which is not to suggest that these processes never occur. It is of course foundational to anthropology, sociology and critical theory that the world as it manifests itself in a particular time and place is not the only one possible. All progressives who cannot or will not contemplate in concrete terms the world they would prefer unwittingly undermine such assertions of anthropological choice, for they effectively indicate that they cannot conceive outside the terms of that which they purport to oppose.

Fotopoulos, by contrast, has a politics to advocate, and it does not matter if I am unpersuaded by various of its detail. In this trope, the important thing is to have a thousand debates, a thousand attempts to 'sharpen the pencil' as many people and organisations each propose the best version they can around that which will enable all to flourish. Put differently, the prospects for vibrant democracies would be vastly enlivened if all who are passionate about politics - of every ideological persuasion - got into the habit of thinking through the detail implicit in their world-view, and then heaved this package into the public domain. We have in Fotopoulos' project an exemplar of such a commitment; in this sense we might experience it as 'democratic gift'.

Moreover, Fotopoulos is grappling for a politics that rejects all forms of domination, yet which is practicable rather than fantastical. If realisable, this would contradistinguish his approach not only from almost every attempt of market capitalism or state socialism, but from almost every society in human history. Such a society may or may not be possible, but if the general proposition is even halfway true that human dignity and wellbeing are undermined by domination, his proposals merit deliberation at a minimum.

Yet here Fotopoulos will be hindered by that which precedes him. In most western and many other polities today, many do not regard various emancipatory politics as forms of ethical practice. It is beyond the scope of this article to develop my thesis that this has often been an entirely reasonable conclusion. If emancipatory politics often commences in the first instance as ethical response to problems of suffering, dignity and community, how on earth has there been such 'dissociation' between ethical aspiration and practice? This is, I suspect, a matter that supporters of such politics might need to ponder over decades before there can be any prospect of the polity even considering their views. While Fotopoulos comprehensively indicts state socialism, my own sense is that there remains much to be done within progressive politics more broadly if its pathologies are to be confronted. For example, the spirit that fuses certainty with self-righteousness is central to the widespread unattractiveness of radical politics. One sees therein the genesis of an authoritarian style of inner life and self-talk that has often manifested itself in commensurate practices wherever it has sufficient power to do so. At least four overlapping problems might be delineated here: mental health, intermittent misanthropy, the subsumption of the ethical and low levels of self-knowledge. This may be the gravest problem likely to confront Fotopoulos' project: presumed guilt by association. The contribution of a project such as Fotopoulos' is that his approach implicitly makes the case

that radicalism need not be mentally unhinged. This is, to put it mildly, a prerequisite if those thus inclined wish to be actors in the contest of ideas. Moreover, Fotopoulos expresses interest in a radicalism that seeks to be ethical<sup>[11]</sup>, rather than the usual self-serving presumption that one is automatically ethical, because radical. One might say that Fotopoulos is feeling for ways in which the economic, political and social might be integrated, ethical and practicable, which I for one regard as itself an eminently ethical thought exercise.

Fotopoulos' approach is admirable for yet another reason. The academy is built extensively upon agon. There are sound reasons for this, but - perhaps as unintended consequence - critique and deconstruction became markers of virtue that are arguably disproportionately rewarded relative to their contribution to humanity. One can build an eminent career in the humanities and social sciences upon taking apart the ideas of others, provided this is accomplished in devastating fashion. One is not required (by oneself or others) to show an alternate approach to the **status quo** or one's interlocutors that is, on balance, preferable. In academia as in Left politics, a 'strategy of negation' is not only deemed to suffice, but works as heroic self-advertisement: clearly my integrity remains intact. In contrast, it requires courage, generosity, clarity of mind and years of painstaking work to put a set of proposals together as Fotopoulos has. These are passed into the public domain, allowing all and sundry to gain kudos through taking potshots, even cheap shots. This is another reason why I regard his project as an honourable one; Fotopoulos has effectively made himself a juicy target, and all for the sake of a bigger idea than himself. In narcissistic times, that is noteworthy. Moreover, Fotopoulos surmounts the usually-intractable binary split where those able to think practically often possess no apparent vision, and those possessed of a decent vision for humans and societies would seemingly be pressed to coordinate their socks, let alone more pressing matters.

In sum, I welcome all thoughtful attempts that meditate upon how the requirements of ethics, economics, politics, community and self might fruitfully be reconciled. Attempts that seek to meld practical detail with a dignified, even uplifted, vision of the human person are especially noteworthy. As I have suggested, I think it much less important that I concur with the detail than that such attempts occur. For all the reasons noted here, I must regard Fotopoulos' inclusive democracy project as one that makes a genuine contribution to debates about human and environmental wellbeing.

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\* This article is an expanded version of a review of *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, published in *Thesis Eleven*, No. 69 (May 2002).

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[1] George Woodcock (1971) *Anarchism*. Middlesex: Penguin.

[2] Takis Fotopoulos (1997) *Towards An Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need For a New Liberatory Project*. London: Cassell.

[3] Woodcock 1971: 446-447.

[4] cf. E. H. Cobham Brewer (1870) *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Fifteenth Edition (Revised Adrian Room), London: Cassell, 1996: 1054; Zygmunt Bauman (2001) *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity: 7-20.

- [5] cf. Peter Christoff (1988) 'Post-industrial utopias', *Arena*, 84, September: 161-166: 163.
- [6] Jack M. Hollander (2003) *The Real Environmental Crisis: Why Poverty, Not Affluence, Is the Environment's Number One Enemy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- [7] Cornelius Castoriadis (1991) *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*. (Edited David Ames Curtis), New York: Oxford University Press (Odeon).
- [8] Mogens Herman Hansen (1991) *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [9] Johann P. Arnason and Peter Murphy (2001) (eds.) *Agon, Logos, Polis: The Greek Achievement and its Aftermath*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- [10] cf. John Stuart Mill (1910) *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government*. (Introduction A. D. Lindsay), Everyman's Library, London: Dent: 175-295.
- [11] cf. Takis Fotopoulos (1997) <[www.democracynature.org/dn/vol8/takis\\_ethics.htm](http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol8/takis_ethics.htm)>.