Part III

Political Pragmatism

The wide view of democracy aims at reconciling the social and the political dimensions of democracy by adopting a unified account of "the democratic way of life" which conceives political behavior as a phase in the wider functioning of a democratic society. According to this view, the social conception of democracy revolves around the idea of patterns of social interaction based on the three principles of: (a) relational parity; (b) inclusive authority, and (c) social involvement. The underlying normative assumption is that social integration is generated through two combined strategies, that is, the development of relations which promote individual self-realization, and normative practices conducive to effective social problem-solving. Both conditions are needed to avoid the reproduction of alienated social circumstances and to prevent the establishment of forms of social domination. This definition of democracy combines an instrumental, or functional, dimension—it functions well in solving societal problems—and an expressive or primitive dimension—it is an end in itself insofar as democratic interactions are their own recompense. Defined in these terms, the concept of democracy has the widest possible application and provides a normative standard that operates in all spheres of social life and can be used to assess the quality of any form of human association, offering guidance in diagnosing social pathologies, identifying positive models of social interaction, and devising prospective processes of social emancipation. So conceived, democracy

defines that form of society in which all basic institutions from the family to the state and all major organizations from schools to firms are organized according to the three principles of: (a) relational parity: (b) inclusive authority, and (c) social involvement, with the added benefit of promoting cooperative learning and problem-solving in a wide range of social situations which largely transcends those rarified moments where politics emerges under the classical guise of collective decision-making. In this sense, democracy achieves the status of a paradigmatic normative concept, as defined in Chap. 2.

A social conception of democracy cannot, therefore, be formulated in terms of a self-standing and purely political theory of institutions. On the contrary, it will have to rely upon substantial theoretical assumptions concerning the nature and functioning of society as well as human psychology. A psycho-social theory of habits, a sociological theory of interactions, and an organizational theory of institutions seem to be the most appropriate avenues for specifying essential features of such a wide view of democracy insofar as they provide actualized and scientifically reliable accounts of what pragmatists identify as the three main drives of social democracy: a democratic ethos; democratic patterns of social interaction, and democratic forms of organization. The task of this and of the following two chapters is to present the outline of a contemporary theory of social democracy in line with the intuition of the early pragmatists, and to show how it can help us advancing our understanding of key issues in social and political philosophy. The last two chapters will submit the group-based theory of politics to a similar treatment, providing an updated and working version of a public-based pragmatist theory of politics.