
III. FICTIONAL REALITY IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

11. Democracy — a Reality of Fictions

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Abstract: The capacity of the fictional to shape, illuminate, and indeed give meaning to the real remains one of the profound philosophical challenges of Modernity. Symbolic thought, linguistic repertoires, grammatical structures, scientific reasoning, art, religion, the media, and photography—each constitutes a means through which a parallel image of the real is produced. As Rorty concludes, “the world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not,” and this distinction bifurcates human minds and existence. Philosophers and social theorists have been devoted to conceptualizing and rendering intelligible this expanding universe of the fictional, within which even “a copy without an original” (Baudrillard) appears possible. This fictional realm, understood in its broadest sense, is the product of the human capacity to theorize, interpret, experience, represent, imagine, and fantasize—and, no less importantly, of our susceptibility to the symbolic and imaginative capacities of others. The article proposes that this capacity takes on its distinctly modern scale and significance through historical processes that liberated the individual from the rigid statuses and dependencies of the medieval order. With emancipation came the freedom to think, and this freedom increasingly shaped the very conditions under which individuals live. Citizens, however, secure, protect, and affirm their newfound status only within the framework—and by means—of democracy. It is democracy that transforms the individual from an object of subjection into a citizen, a subject entitled to participate in the making of binding decisions. This transformation is impossible unless the political system, in its decision-making, abstracts from the personal characteristics of those who are governed and those who govern. Democracy is, at its core, a political system predicated upon the presumption of equality of all citizens, and