

Your Brain on New Media: Communicative Democracy, Tyranny, and Enabling Ambivalence¹

Patrick Hogan*

Communicative democracy is the equal participation of all citizens in political discourse. There are two aspects to that participation—speaking and being heard. It is clear that there are gross inequalities in both. These inequalities are related to the communicative domination of three “tyrannies”—the state, elite (particularly corporate) minorities, and (less so) the majority population. The problem of these inequalities is in many ways exacerbated by new media (e.g., many-to-many interactive media, such as the internet). This essay considers the problem of communicative inequality in relation to new media. It addresses some possible responses to this problem, particularly restrictions on speech and requirements bearing on the representation of diverse views. To discuss this topic more rigorously, it makes use of recent research on human cognitive and motivational systems. The analysis suggests the importance of motivational ambivalence for deliberation on issues of public concern. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: http://www.transformativestudies.org ©2011 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS: Communication, Democracy, Emotion, Cognition, Equality, Free Speech, Media.

In his valuable study of freedom of speech, Frederick Schauer notes that “Equal participation by all people in the process of government is even more fundamental to the ideal of self-government than is the idea of majority power” (41). Insofar as this equality is a matter of discourse (as opposed to other forms of action), we may refer to it as “communicative democracy.”² If we are serious about fostering discursive equality, thus genuine communicative democracy, then we are almost of necessity serious about limiting three sorts of tyranny, identified by writers on civil

* **Patrick Hogan**, Ph.D., is Professor of English in the Department of English at the University of Connecticut. Address correspondence to: Patrick Hogan, 215 Glenbrook Road, U-4025, Storrs, CT 06269-4025; e-mail: patrick.hogan@uconn.edu.