

The meaning of democracy

Two Greek words at origin of the idea.
'ho demos', 'the common folk'
'kratein, 'to rule, to control'.
The demos, in what sense,
is in control, in what sense?
How seriously can we take 'demo-crazy'?

Plan of lectures

- 1.The populace rules: an electoral model.
- 2.The people rules: a corporate model.
- 3.The public rules: a civic model.
- 4.Implementing public rule.

Methodology

The approach to be taken in each case.
Consider the model and ask:
Is it a conceptual fit: democratic?
Is it an empirical fit: adumbrated?
Is it normatively appealing?
Reflective equilibrium.

Political Philosophy.

Political philosophy plays two roles.

1. In arguing the structural issue
2. In arguing participant issues
from within a preferred structure.

A structurally ideal system may produce
results participants should challenge

Sets, Groups, Group-Agents.

The (unorganized) set of people:
e.g. those living at the same latitude.
The (organized) group of people:
e.g. the members of a market.
The group (organized to be an) agent:
e.g. the members of an association.

The People without Agency

Bentham, radical
'The community is a fictitious
body...The interest of the community
is the sum of the interests of the
several members'.
Oakeshott, conservative
The demos is not an universitas,
but a societas.

The Problem

How can a non-agentive group
be said as a group to do something?
How can a non-agentive people
be said to exercise government?
They may individually check government
but how can they jointly govern/rule?

The market model

The producers: political parties
The consumers: voters
The currency: votes
Prices are fixed in the choice of goods:
policies in the choice of party.
Together people make prices & policies,
individually they take them.

Origin of Market Model

James Mill Essay on Government 1820
more or less explicitly uses the model.

He assumes
that people are self-interested;
that gov't should serve their interests;
that representation can ensure it will
— if things are properly arranged.

James Mill's principle

For each representative things are to be
'so arranged, that, in his capacity of
Representative, it would be
impossible for him to do himself so
much good by misgovernment, as he
would do himself harm in his capacity
of member of the community'

Later developments

This model of the polity is developed
by Schumpeter and Public Choice.
The key analogy stressed in the model
is that of competition.
Market agents compete for custom.
Political parties compete for support.

The majoritarian problem

But won't this just be majority rule
and possibly majority tyranny?
The Buchanan-Tullock amendment.
Implement majority choice under rules
that all would have accepted ex ante.
This will then mean the the electorate
only rules within severe limits.

The demands of the model

- A. Electoral demand has to be serious, though it is not for personal allocation.
- B. Electoral supply has to be open, with freedom of entry to the polity.
- C. Electoral choice has to be effective, with voters getting what they choose.

Electoral demand

Electoral demand is a problem due to

- a. Lack of rational motivation to vote, or to go to the polls; or to vote according to one's interest in the outcome.
- b. The more or less arbitrary effect of electoral rules and electoral districts.

Electoral supply

Electoral supply is a problem because:

- 1. Policies can't vary continuously; they are pre-sized.
- 2. Policies can't vary independently; they are pre-packaged
- 3. The organizational and financial costs for a new party are prohibitive.

Electoral choice

Electoral choice is a problem because

- 1. Parties can't deliver on promises, due to party indiscipline.
- 2. Parties are obliged to financiers, who support their campaigns.
- 3. Voters can't track the performance of parties in government.

Three questions

Is this conceptually democratic?

Not really. Rather a system of checks.

Is it adumbrated in actual institutions?

Yes, in any periodic electoral system.

Is it normatively attractive?

As an improvable check, yes.

The one sure benefit

Competitive election is a determiner of succession that has legitimacy, ensures stability, and is incapable of capture or intrusion.

The impersonal selection at least means government is not for any dynasty.