

## Introduction. The Value of Democracy

### 1 Topic

- This course will focus on *contemporary philosophical* approaches to *democracy*.
- Guiding question: **what makes democracy valuable?**
- Possible answers: equality, consent, deliberation, representation, voting, outcomes, ...
- Task for philosophy: order, clarify and examine these options

### 2 Starting Points

In doing philosophy, it is often useful to start from beliefs we're already holding, and then check whether and how we can defend them. How would you complete the following sentence:

Democracy is valuable because ...

If you find it difficult to answer this question, here are some proposals to complete this sentence. Do you agree with the following claims? If not, why not? How would you rank the importance of these factors?

1. *Consent*: Democracy is valuable because it is based on the consent of the governed.
2. *Equal Say*: Democracy is valuable because it gives everyone an equal say.
3. *Freedom*: Democracy is valuable because people living under it enjoy freedom and wide-ranging personal rights.

4. *Representation*: Democracy is valuable because democratic governments represent (and implement) the will of the people.
5. *Making a Difference*: Democracy is valuable because each individual's opinion in it makes a difference.
6. *Finding Truth*: Democracy is valuable because the open contest between ideas in it ensures that the truth will come out (eventually).
7. *Virtue*: Democracy is valuable because participation in politics is ennobling—it makes us more tolerant, more virtuous, and perhaps even happier.
8. *Outcomes*: Democracy is valuable because it is more likely than other modes of government to promote justice, encourage economic growth, and have other beneficial effects.
9. *Other ...*

Note that we might value democracy for several reasons, not only for one. Philosophically, it's useful to think about conflicts. What if there's a conflict between some of the reasons we why value democracy?

### 3 The Value of Democracy

Questions about the value of democracy are often phrased in terms of the value of democracy.

If something has *instrumental* value, then we value it as a tool. If something has *intrinsic* value, then we value it for its own sake. Note

that something can have *both* intrinsic and instrumental value. (Give examples!)

One of the main questions in democratic theory: does democracy have intrinsic value, or does it have merely instrumental value? To ask this question, we need to distinguish *procedure* from *outcomes*. (How should we make this distinction?)

Explanations for why democracy is valuable:

	procedures	outcomes
pure proceduralism	X	
pure instrumentalism		X
hybrid views	X	X
impure proceduralism	X	x
impure instrumentalism	x	X

**Discussion Cases.** (i) Imagine that a majority of people vote to discriminate against some minority group.  
 (ii) Imagine that we can significantly improve economic growth if economic policy-making is given over to unelected experts.  
 (iii) *Margaret's Dilemma* (Brettschneider 2005, 425-6). Margaret is a democratic theorist who finds herself on the Supreme Court in a country that has both judicial review and a national plebiscite system. She is confronted with the question of whether or not she should strike down a plebiscite.

#### 4 Brettschneider: “Balancing Procedures and Outcomes”

Brettschneider argues for a hybrid view, and against the other four views.

1. What are the problems (Brettschneider identifies) with pure/impure instrumentalism?
2. What are the problems (Brettschneider identifies) with pure/impure proceduralism?

Brettschneider argues that one of the main advantages of his view is that it allows us to accept conflicting democratic values (2005, 433).

Brettschneider repeatedly speaks of the “core values of democracy”. What are they? How do these values help us to argue for his hybrid view? Do you agree with the fundamental values that he identifies?

*Philosophical theorising about democracy.* (i) Brettschneider studies no empirical data, provides no real-world examples in support of his views. Is this a problem? (ii) How would one argue against Brettschneider?

## 5 Anderson: “Democracy: Instrumental vs Non-Instrumental Value”

*Defining Democracy.* Anderson argues that democracy can be understood as (i) a membership organization, (ii) a mode of government, and (iii) a culture.

This brings up a general question: how should we define democracy? What is democracy at its core? (General background question: how do we define a political concept?)

*Thin and Thick.* Let us distinguish thin and thick definitions of democracy. On a thin definition, democracy is merely a method of making political decisions. On a thick definition, democracy also entails a system of government that realises a number of features—such as equal rights, protection of liberties, an active culture of participation, etc.

When you intuitively think about democracy, do you have a thick or thin definition in mind? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the thin and thick definitions?

*Instrumental and Noninstrumental Value.* Anderson identifies four goods that democracy (as a way of life) realises (p. 219): (i) social relations of equality and mutual respect, (ii) protection against subordination and corruption of character, (iii) sympathy and autonomy, and (iv) collective learning. Do you agree with her list?

Anderson claims that the “noninstrumental value [of democracy] is conditional on its instrumental value”. What does this mean?

## 6 Why does it matter?

How does the distinction between instrumentalism and proceduralism matter? Where does it make a difference in our thinking about democracy?

[Constitutional design (presidential vs parliamentary system), attitude towards lobbyism, referenda, primaries, the role of political parties, etc. More generally, the basis on which we ought to compare democracy to non-democratic solutions, how we would measure the health/existence of democracy, etc.]