
Democracy for the 21th Century: Research Challenges

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Gustaf Arrhenius

Department of Philosophy, Stockholm University

The Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study

Collège d'études mondial

Gustaf.Arrhenius@philosophy.su.se

<http://people.su.se/~guarr/>

I. Introduction

The extraordinary political events in the last thirty years have made reflections on the value and nature of democracy all the more pressing and important. On the one hand, we have seen a number of countries around the world that have changed their political system from one party systems (e.g., countries in Eastern Europe, Russia), dictatorships (e.g., South-America), and minority rule (e.g., South-Africa) to some form of liberal democratic system which gives the impression of a victory for democratic rule. The so-called “Arabic spring” seems to follow this trend or so it is hoped. On the other hand, the increasing power of multinational companies and the growth of supranational states and institutions (e.g. EU, WTO) seem to usurp the power of democratically elected national governments in favour of non-elected bodies and thus seem to indicate a crisis for democracy.

In the light of these events, we need to ask again fundamental questions regarding the scope and limits of democratic rule and its justification. What issues ought to be decided democratically? What is the appropriate domain of democracy? Is its domain only national states or should it also be applied to supranational states of considerable size or perhaps even globally? Can it be applied to non-geographical entities such as international institutions and companies? What is the relation between individual (liberal) rights and democratic rule: are they competing ideals or merely flip sides of the same coin?

I shall here focus on neglected problem in democratic theory which the above described development has made all the more pertinent to address: Who should be eligible to take part in which decision-making processes? I think this *boundary problem*, or the demos problem as it is also called, have the potential of bringing about a Copernican change in our understanding of democracy and it carries with it attractive potential answers to all the questions listed above.¹ It is clearly a fundamental issue in democratic theory since if nothing else, all the different notions of democracy have one thing in common: a reference to a community of individuals, “a people” who are, in some sense, collectively self-governing. Surprisingly, however, little attention has been given to this problem in the classical canonical treatises on democracy. As Robert Dahl puts it, “how to decide who legitimately make up 'the people' ... and hence are entitled to govern themselves ... is a problem almost totally neglected by all the great political philosophers who write about democracy.”² Dahl wrote this back in the seventies but unfortunately it remains to a too great extent true today. However, although the literature is still scant, there has been a significant and welcome improvement in connection with the renewed interest in the feasibility and desirability of global democracy.

The boundary problem is not only a conundrum of philosophical interest but also a pressing practical political problem. For example, what is the relevant constituency for a democratic solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland? Should a treaty be approved by the citizens (or their representatives) of Northern Ireland alone or should it also involve those of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic as well? The current treaty — “the Good Friday Agreement” — was put to a referendum in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic whereas the citizens in United Kingdom were represented by their government. It is hardly the favoured solution for an old-style Unionist, he would prefer a referendum in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland or perhaps only in Northern Ireland.³ Yet, such a referendum would not impress an Irish nationalist who would consider these boundaries arbitrary and illegitimate, nothing more than a kind of international gerrymandering. Still, both the Unionist and the Irish nationalist could be dedicated democrats in the sense that they think that a fair solution should be based on a democratic referendum.

¹ Robert Dahl (1989) refers to this problem as “the problem of the unit” (p. 193), “the problem of inclusion” (p. 119), and sometimes as the “boundary problem” (pp. 146-7). Robert Goodin (2007) calls it “the problem of ‘constituting the demos’”. Frederick G. Whelan calls it “the boundary problem” in his (1983) pioneering article on the subject, and so shall I.

² Dahl (1970), p. 60. Cf. Dahl (1989), pp. 119ff.

³ It is telling that in the referendum about the treaty, an estimated 96% of the Catholics supported it whereas only 52% of the Protestants gave it its blessing. See <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/bakgrund/utrikes/europa/nordirlandny2/fredsprocessen.htm> (25 February 2005).

It is easy to give more examples of existing boundary problems. A Swedish example is the local referendum about congestion charges in Stockholm. Was it right that only the people living in the city of Stockholm had a vote? One might claim, as many did, that the inhabitants in the surrounding suburbs who on a regular basis commute to central Stockholm also should have had the vote. Another current issue (e.g., France) is the voting rights in local elections for non-citizens who reside in a country for an extended time. A third constantly recurring question is which issues in the EU that should be handled on national or supranational level.

How should questions like these be decided? Perhaps one should have a referendum about who should have say in these questions. But who should be allowed to take part in such a referendum? And so on without any end, we seem to end up in an infinite regress. This chain of reasoning has led some to draw quite gloomy conclusions regarding both the ability of democratic theory to solve the boundary problem in a satisfactory manner and the scope and legitimacy of democratic decision-making. Frederick G. Whelan, in his pioneering paper on the boundary problem, claims that "... democratic theory *cannot itself* provide any solution to disputes that may ... arise concerning boundaries. --- The boundary problem does ... reveal one of the limits of the applicability of democracy...".⁴ Likewise, Dahl stresses that "we cannot solve the problem of the proper scope and domain of democratic units from within democratic theory".⁵

Although I don't agree with Whelan's and Dahl's gloomy conclusions,⁶ I indeed agree that the boundary problem reveals a problem at the hearth of the very idea of democracy. That a decision is made with a democratic decision method by a certain group of people (or by an elected assembly that represents the group) doesn't suffice for making the decision democratic or satisfactory from a democratic perspective. The group also has to be the right one. But what makes a group the right one?

II. Two Classical Notions of Democracy: Schumpeter and Ross

As mentioned by Dahl in the quote above, the boundary problem has been almost ignored by the great theorist of democracy in the past. A case in point is Joseph Schumpeter's influential revisionist definition of democracy:

⁴ Whelan (1983), pp. 40, 42.

⁵ Dahl (1989), p. 207. In Dahl's terminology, the "scope" of a democratic unit is the set of matters that are to be decided by it, and the "domain" is the set of persons who comprise it. Dahl (1989), p. 209 also claims that "in solving this particular problem [the problem of constituting the people] democratic theory cannot take us very far. Democratic ideas, as I have said, do not yield a definitive answer" and it cannot be solved even by "reasoned inferences from democratic principles and practices". Cf. Barry 1991.

⁶ I rebut it in my (2005) and (2011a) papers.

The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.⁷

Schumpeter developed his definition in analogy with firms in a capitalist market: Firms competes with others to sell products at a profitable prize and only the most competitive firms survive. As he writes elsewhere "... we have restricted the kind of competition for leadership which is to define democracy, to free competition for a free vote. --- Free, that is, in the same sense in which everyone is free to start another textile mill".⁸ He developed his definition by looking at states that people called "democratic" and extracted what he thought they had in common. Hence, his definition is based on a denotation (extension) analysis of the term "democracy" as it was used in his time and environment and as such, I surmise, quite accurate.

Notice, however, that nothing is said about the boundary problem, that is, who has a vote or for whose vote can one compete to acquire power. So in this respect, Schumpeter's denotation analysis and definition are remarkably incomplete but also, I'm afraid, representative of the definitions that have been proposed in the literature.⁹

One might think that Alf Ross' definition is an exception. He defines an "ideal type" of democracy with three dimensions that can be fulfilled to varying degrees:

1. [I]ntensity, that is with respect to the *size of the population* that are allowed to take part in referenda and elections. ---
2. [E]fficiency, that is, with respect to the effectiveness of the popular will in deciding issues. ---
3. [E]xtensity, that is, with respect to the scope of popular influence and control over the *different branches of government*.¹⁰

Here, one might think that the clause regarding *Intensity* answers the boundary problem: The more people that are allowed to take part in a vote, the greater the degree of democracy. However, this is not exactly what Ross had in mind since he has presupposed a constitution of a

⁷ Schumpeter (1976), p. 269.

⁸ Schumpeter (1976), p. 271 and p. 272, fn. 6.

⁹ The same holds for Schumpeter's (1976, p. 250) statement of the "classical" definition of democracy: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its [the people's] will". Again, nothing is said about what constitutes the people.

¹⁰ See Ross (1968), pp. 101-2, my translation.

“people” and *Intensity* is the percentage of the “people” who are (legally) allowed to take part in a vote. As he writes just before the passage quoted above: “... the people’s influence on the exercise of public authority, can vary with respect to...”.

So Dahl is right that the boundary problem has mostly been ignored in the canons of democratic theory. Let’s now turn a possible answer to the boundary problem and its implication for how we should conceptualise democracy.

III. Democracy as a Normative Ideal and the All Affected Principle

Firstly, we need to consider an important but often neglected distinction between two ways of understanding democracy which unfortunately hasn’t been observed sufficiently by some contributors to the discussion. Among moral theorists, it is commonly acknowledged that one needs to distinguish between normative ideals, on the one hand, and practical decision methods or rules for regulating social interactions (e.g., social norms, laws, institutions), on the other hand.¹¹ Roughly, a normative ideal states the ultimate goal that that we strive towards, such as the just or good society (i.e., the considerations that ultimately make actions, policies, institutions etc, right, just, or fair), whereas a decision method is a strategy for decision-making which we use to achieve the goal specified by the ideal. We use the normative ideal, in conjunction with empirical considerations (e.g., economical and psychological facts), to evaluate and rank alternative decision methods, social norms, laws, institutions, etc., for different situations and contexts, in respect to how well they would promote the ideal. In that sense, the application of a certain decision method is justified by our normative ideal whereas the ideal is justified by being in accordance with our considered normative judgments and by satisfying other relevant epistemological and methodological criteria (e.g., what John Rawls calls “reflective equilibrium”).¹²

As with any other normative theory, a theory of democracy can be taken either as a normative ideal or as a practical decision method. As R. J. Pennock puts it succinctly in a discussion of Wollheim’s paradox: “One must distinguish at the outset between democracy as an ideal and democracy as a practical device for approximating the ideal”.¹³

For those who study how democracy works in practice, it is probably more common to view democracy as a kind of decision method, as a matter of institutional arrangements. Schumpeter is a case in point. The use of such a decision method, in turn, is justified by some

¹¹ See Bales (1971) and Danielsson (1974), pp. 28-9, for an excellent treatment of this issue. Danielsson and Tännsjö (1991) make the distinction in connection with democratic theory. See also Brink (1986), pp. 421-7; Kymlicka (1990), p. 29.

¹² See Rawls (1971) and Tersman (1993).

¹³ Pennock (1973), p. 88.

normative ideal, which might be, but doesn't have to be, a theory of justice. For Rawlsian liberals, for example, democracy is justified (roughly) if it is the best decision procedure for the safeguarding of basic civil liberties, equal opportunity and the well-being of the worst-off. For utilitarians, to take another example, democracy (of some kind) is justified if and only if its use maximises people's well-being as compared to alternative decision methods. For Nozickian libertarians, democracy is justified insofar it respects people's property-rights, and so forth for other normative ideals.

Implicit in much reasoning about democracy, however, is also the idea that democracy is a kind of normative ideal in itself. For example, it is presumed in much work in social choice theory and in many proud political declarations --- in the latter case often expressed in terms of justice and equality.¹⁴ Although I shall not dwell much on the details of such a theory in this paper, I think that the most promising approach is to take democracy as a theory of fair distribution of influence or power (I shall say a bit more about it in the last section).¹⁵ Given such a conception of democracy, the most promising boundary criterion is the *All Affected Principle*: The people that are relevantly affected by a decision ought to have, in some sense and to varying degrees depending on how much they are affected by it, influence over the decision. I think it is fair to say that it is implicit in much reasoning in the democratic tradition and the contemporary democratic theorists who explicitly take up the boundary problem endorse some version of this principle: "Everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government" (Dahl); "In a perfect democracy all who are thus affected [by a decision] play some part" (Cohen); "[A]ll affected interests should have a say" (Goodin); "Power in any decision-making process should be proportional to individual stakes" (Brighouse & Fleurbaey).¹⁶

It is easy to garner intuitive support for All Affected Principle. We do not think that the curriculum imposed by the School board of Waco, Texas, is any business of Icelanders since they are not relevantly affected by this decision. Likewise, people in Luleå (far up north in Sweden) should not, in most cases, have much of a say on how the public transportation is organized in

¹⁴ See Naess (1956) for a list of such slogans.

¹⁵ The best developed version of this kind of ideal in the literature is Brighouse & Fleurbaey (2008). Two other examples are Danielsson's (1974) suggestion to take problems of preference aggregation, such as Arrow's impossibility theorem, as problems of just distribution of influence, and Cristiano's (1993, 1996) theory of democracy as an ideal of equal chances to affect the outcome.

¹⁶ Dahl (1970), p. 64; Cohen (1971), p. 8; Goodin (2007), p. 50; Brighouse & Fleurbaey 2008, p. 2. Cunningham (1994), p. 147, also seems to endorse the All Affected Principle when he says that "since democracy applies to any social environment in which the behaviour of some people affect others in an ongoing way, it is appropriate to extend . . . democratic decision making . . . beyond national boundaries to regions and to the entire globe." See also Cunningham (1987), pp. 25-6, and Shapiro (1996). For some criticism of the All Affected Principle, see, among others, Miller (2009). I answer Miller's criticism in my (2011a) paper.

Stockholm, e.g., whether to increase the number of buses to a certain suburb. However, what kind of hair spray the teachers use in Waco is the business of Icelanders too, i.e., if the hair spray used destroys the ozone-layer. Similarly, whether state tax revenue should be used to subsidise the public transportation system in Stockholm is arguably an issue that the people in Luleå, qua taxpayers, should have some form of influence over. Another example is France's nuclear bomb testing in the Muroroua Atoll -- we think that the people of the Muroroua Atoll should have much more influence over a decision that affects their environment in such a fundamental way.

According to the All Affected Principle, how much power you ought to have over an issue depends on how much your interests are at stake. In actual democratic practices we approximate this standard by having different issues handled on different levels: councils, provinces, regions, states, European, and so forth. The subsidiarity principle, frequently invoked in the discussion of decision making in the European Union, is in one of its popular interpretations --- “decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen” --- very much along the lines of All Affected Principle. The general prescription of this principle is that an issue should be handled by the democratically run body that represents the social union that best approximates the set of relevantly affected people relative to the type of issue.

One reason why many people would agree with the All Affected Principle, however, is that it is very vague. As it has been stated, it doesn't say anything about what amounts to being relevantly affected or what it means to have influence or control over a decision. Hence, it is hard to see its implications for institutional design. Here is an area where more analysis is needed in the future. Let me give some examples.

Should “relevantly affected” be spelled out in terms of people's well-being, preferences or interests or in some other way? What should we do with “nosy” or “meddlesome” preferences?¹⁷ Although some preferences we have for how other people lead their lives, for instance their use of cars, seem to be legitimate from a democratic perspective and therefore should be counted, others seems not, for example what other people read or what consenting adults decide to do in their bedrooms. This question is all the more pressing for democracy in today's multicultural societies in which competing and incompatible views on how one should lead one's life need to co-exist.

Much work has been done in respect to well-being and “the currency of egalitarian justice” and much in that discussion is surely relevant for the present topic.¹⁸ One might also think that one could just import an axiology from this area, such as Rawls' “primary goods” or Sen's

¹⁷ See e.g., Sen (1970); Dworkin (2000, 1981a).

¹⁸ See e.g., Rawls (1971); Cohen (1989), Dworkin (1981a, b, 2000); Sen (1992)

“capabilities”, as an explication of “relevantly affected”. This is suggested by Brighouse and Fleurbaey and an advantage with this approach is that it might bring democratic decision making more in line with what is good from perspective of justice and morality.¹⁹ However, as I argue in my (2011a) paper, our judgment about when people are affected by a decision in such a way that they should have influence over it may be different in many respects from our judgment about when people’s well-being is affected, or about the relevant goods for the state to distribute in an egalitarian fashion. The example of “nosy preferences” is a case in point: Even if I am so disgusted by the lewd literature that you read, or by your choice of bedroom activities, that my well-being is seriously at stake, it still seems that I shouldn’t have any power over you in regards to such activities, you (and your partner if one is needed) should have all the power to decide such issues.

A quite popular suggestion is that those who are legally bound by certain laws should have the right to take part in making the law.²⁰ This might very well be a better exegesis of the common phrase “government by the governed” or as Lincoln once expressed it: “A government of the people by the same people.”²¹ However, the “legally bound principle” has, in my mind, too narrow a scope to be reasonable explication of “relevantly affected”. Although the Danes aren’t legally bound by the laws regarding the maintenance of nuclear plants on the south coast of Sweden (just across from Copenhagen), they certainly, and justifiably me thinks, would like to have a say in this matter.²²

At any rate, the main point is that we have to develop a theory of what counts as being relevantly affected by consulting our considered intuitions about which effects on people’s interest are of such significance that they should have a say in the decision at stake. To spell out such a theory in detail will be, I surmise, one of the main challenges for future research in democratic theory.

It is important to note that the All Affected Principle will have very different implications depending on what explication of “relevantly affected” it is coupled with. Hence, whether it will be a radical or conservative principle is up for grabs. If “relevantly affected” is spelled out in terms of some list of negative rights, then it might come close to the right-wing libertarian camp

¹⁹ Brighouse & Fleurbaey (2008), p. 15. Roughly, if people vote in accordance with what is good for them from the perspective of the metric of social justice, then the winning alternative will also be the one that maximises social justice.

²⁰ See Tännsjö (1992), and Beckman (2004) for a discussion.

²¹ Lincoln in Message to Congress, 1861, quoted from Naess (1956), p. 285.

²² Moreover, the scope of “legally bound” is quite unclear. I’m in a sense legally bound by the laws of South Africa since I spend a fortnight there every year. Does that mean that I should have a right to take part in the South African elections?

(e.g. Nozick-style libertarianism) since people will be sovereign regarding most issues. If it is spelled out in terms of people's interest (including aspects of people's wellbeing), or in terms of negative and positive rights, then it will probably become more left-wing in its implications since, for example, the management of firms will become part of the democratic domain. Hence, different political theories might be explicated in terms of different notions of "relevantly affected" and as such subsumed under the more general idea of democracy as fair distribution of power.

A corollary of this observation is that boundary problem shows that democracy as some super-ideology that is neutral between competing political ideologies is unfortunately an illusion. Whether one considers that an issue is resolved in a sufficiently democratic manner will depend on one's view on what counts as being relevantly affected, which of course partly depends on one's values and political outlook. This point is vividly illustrated by the case of Northern Ireland which I described in the introduction.

Another fundamental question for the All Affected Principle is when can we say that a person has had sufficient influence over a decision, or has sufficiently taken part in it? Is it enough to be able, together with others, to stop proposed legislation, or should one also be able to influence the drafting and the legislative agenda? How can influence be carried over from an individual to her representatives? How can one compare and measure different individual's power? Here we need an analysis of the concepts of "influence" and "power" in relation to democratic ideals. Such an analysis will be a second major challenge for future democratic theory. Let me say a bit more about it here.

The standard measures of voting power are measures of what I call potential influence. You have potential influence on a decision if there is a possible situation (i.e., a possible set of individual preference orderings or voting patterns of the involved people) where you are decisive, that is, where your preference or vote will determine the outcome.²³

As I have suggested, we might also be interested in probable and actual influence. An individual's probable influence in a situation is the probability of her being decisive whereas an individual's actual influence given a number of issues is the number of times she is decisive divided with the number of decided issues.²⁴

One might have potential influence without having any probable or actual influence, and one might have probable influence without having actual influence. The majority principle, for example, gives everybody the same potential influence. However, if everyone is against you, then

²³ Measures of potential influence were first proposed by Penrose (1946), Shapley & Shubik (1954), and Banzhaf (1965) (see Felsenthal & Machover 1998 for an overview). I discuss these kind of measures further in my (2008a).

²⁴ Arrhenius (2008b).

the probability that you will be decisive is zero, and you will never be decisive. Hence, you have no probable and actual influence. In other words, there is a tension between these three different kinds of influence and it might not be satisfactory to give people only potential or probable influence without giving them any actual influence.

Moreover, our analysis above has to be supplemented with an analysis of other avenues for an individual's influence over a collective decision. I distinguish among four different ways of such influence. Firstly, one can have influence via one's preference or belief, typically through a vote or through opinion polls. This is the kind of influence we discussed above.

Secondly, one can have influence over a collective decision via an impact on other people's preferences and beliefs. Examples of this kind of influence is the ability to give convincing reasons, control over information (e.g., access and ownership of mass media), charisma and reputation, indoctrination and ideology.²⁵

Thirdly, one can have influence over the choice situation, that is, over the alternatives among which people can choose. By and large, political parties decide which policies we can choose among in an election, and in that way have great influence over which policies that are finally adopted. Another more pernicious version of this kind of influence is threats and bribes. If I offer you a million Euros if you vote in a certain way, I have changed what you have a choice between since one of the alternatives now involves you receiving a million dollar. Likewise if I wield a credible threat.

Lastly, one can have influence over the constitution of the demos, by having, for example, power over which voting rule that will be used, who has a vote and how much it counts. A more worrisome version of this influence is the power to stop people from voting by threatening them with sanctions.

We have to take into account all of these different avenues of influence when we consider the best formulation of the influence part of the All Affected Principle. To formulate these different version of influence in an exact manner and to make the operational and comparable between individuals is another great challenge for future research in democratic theory.

Again, the All Affected Principle will have very different implications depending on what explication of "relevantly affected" and "influence" with which it is coupled. This is a trivial but important point since many arguments against the All Affected Principle is actually arguments about how "relevantly affected" and "influence" should be understood. Hence, much of the criticism of the All Affected Principle misses in this sense its target. Let me just give one example. Robert Nozick argues against the principle that "people have a right to a say in the decision that

²⁵ See e.g., Lukes (2005, 1986); Foucault (1976); Morriss (1987).

importantly affect their lives” with a number of examples where the principle purportedly gives the wrong answer.²⁶ Here is one:

If four men propose marriage to a woman, her decision about whom ... to marry importantly affects each of the lives of those four persons, her own life, and the lives of any other person wishing to marry one of these four men, and so on. Would anyone propose, even limiting the group to include only the primary parties, that all five persons vote to decide whom she shall marry?²⁷

Nozick answer is a resounding “no” and I think most people would agree. This will not, however, worry a proponent of the All Affected Principle. She can happily agree with Nozick and argue that when it comes to such vital interests as to whom to marry, the individual should be sovereign and have a veto right, it is up to the woman herself to decide whom to marry. On the other hand, it seems reasonable that the four suitors have a right to try to influence the decision in the sense that they have a right to present their case, send flowers and poems, etc., as a corollary of some form of freedom of speech (the woman is of course also free to just ignore such courting). To think that Nozick’s example is a decisive argument against the All Affected Principle is to make a triple mistake. Firstly, the All Affected Principle is flexible since it can be coupled with different notions of “relevantly affected”, and, secondly, “having a say” (“having influence”) need not to be equated with voting rights, and, thirdly, one can give people different degrees and kinds of influence relative to how they are affected by a decision.

As the above discussion illustrates, the All Affected Principle makes the normative scope of democracy much greater than usually perceived – it ranges from questions that affect everybody to questions that affect only one person, from world government to individual rights. The All Affected Principle gives support to the idea that all social unions are candidates for democratic rule. Does this squeeze out individual rights and allows for the “tyranny of the majority”, a constant worry in the literature on democracy? As the discussion above of Nozick’s suitors indicates, this is not the case as one can reasonably claim that there are acts that have such dramatic effects on people’s interests that no one has the right to decide that another person

²⁶ Nozick (1974), p. 268.

²⁷ Nozick (1974), p. 269. Nozick (p. 269) also gives the following example: “Does Thidwick, the Big-Hearted Moose, have to abide by the vote of all the animals living in his antlers that he not go across the lake to an area in which food is more plentiful?”. I don’t find this example very counterintuitive, at least not if we suppose that the animals living in Thidwick’s antlers are conscious mentally competent beings and that it is a life-and-death question for them but just a matter of greener grass for Thidwick. In that case, it seems reasonable that the animals should have not only a vote but perhaps also a veto right against Thidwick’s proposed course of action.

should be subjected to them against her will. One could conceive of this as the affected individual being sovereign in such cases and that the relevant social union is the individual herself. This approach suggests a novel and promising way of squaring our intuitions regarding the necessity of majority rule over certain issues (and the need for global governance of some issues), on the one hand, and individual rights, on the other hand, i.e., a solution to the classical conflict between liberalism and democracy (Bobbio 1990). Hence, given the All Affected Principle, individual rights and democracy is not at loggerheads; rather the former is an implication of the latter.²⁸

IV. Democracy as Fair Distribution of Influence

I've argued that the boundary problem forces us to reconsider fundamental questions regarding the theoretical status of democracy. It also opens up for a new exciting way of understanding democracy, namely as a theory of fair distribution of influence or power. In this closing section, I shall say a bit more about how such a democratic ideal departs from the received view on democracy. Let me stress that this is a sketch only and quite a speculative one too. What I hope to achieve here is to show that democracy taken as a theory of fair distribution of power is a promising and exciting approach to an old topic which has not been sufficiently investigated and calls for further research.²⁹

To avoid a possible misunderstanding, let me also add that I do not think there is one correct way of defining democracy (although there might be a common kernel) and that I do not propose that democracy seen as fair distribution of influence is the only way of explicating the ordinary language use of the term "democracy". I couch the theory on fair distribution of influence in the language of democracy, because it appears to be sufficiently in line with many intuitions that people have in regard to democracy to warrant the label "democracy".

In what we roughly could characterise as the received view of democracy, the democratic ideal is conceived in terms of some sort of equality among citizens, often expressed by the slogan "one person, one vote", in combination with the idea of majority rule. This conception is afflicted with a number of well-known and often discussed problems: majorities may oppress minorities and infringe on basic individual rights; majority cycles may lead to inconsistent and arbitrary decisions; outcomes can be manipulated by the person or group that sets the voting agenda and

²⁸ For the same view, see Brighthouse & Fleurbaey (2008).

²⁹ Many of the ideas in this section have also been proposed in the excellent Brighthouse & Fleurbaey (2008). See also Arrhenius (2005).

so forth.³⁰ Such features of majoritarian decisions seem to put democracy at odds with theories of social justice and considerations of efficiency.³¹

A related issue has to do with the status of democracy conceived either as a hard to attain normative ideal (an “utopia”) or as an easily satisfied “realist” notion based on the actual properties of those political systems we commonly refer to as democratic (like Schumpeter’s definition that we discussed above).³² As Brighouse and Fleurbaey points out, the difficulties of majoritarian democracy discussed above have often been taken as a decisive argument against more ambitious notions of democracy. In addition, it is often observed that the inequalities of influence and political resources among individuals, which stand in the way of the fulfilment of the egalitarian democratic ideal, often seem to enhance the efficiency of political institutions. This might be considered to give support to the adoption of a modest notion of democracy and put in question the more demanding definitions.³³

The alternative view involves three main departures from the above features of the received view. The first departure is that democracy is taken as a demanding normative ideal for the regulation of social interactions, on par with, and in competition with, theories such as, for example, Rawlsian liberalism and utilitarianism. That it is demanding, and that it might be very hard if not impossible to completely fulfil the ideal in the real world, doesn’t mean that it is deprived of any practical use. On the contrary, as we discussed above, such an ideal provides a scale on which institutions, social norms, laws, etc., can be ranked as more or less democratic. Notice also that such a democratic ideal need not be our only ideal. We might have other ideals, such as the utilitarian ideal of maximisation of the common good, which the democratic ideal has to be weighed against in reaching a final theory of how a just or good society should look like.

In accordance with the All Affected Principle, a second departure from the received view is that the principle of equality as part of the foundation of democracy will be replaced by a proportionality principle of some sort. Roughly, on the received view, a decision is optimally democratic if each individual has the same (maximal) influence on the decision, encapsulated in the slogan “one person, one vote”. As Morriss (1987) put it, “[t]he democratic ideal is simultaneously to give people equal power and maximize the total amount”. In democracy as fair distribution of influence, this egalitarian principle would be replaced by a version of the All Affected Principle which I call *Proportionalism*. A decision is optimally democratic if and only if each individual’s influence on the decision is proportional to how each individual’s relevant

³⁰ See, e.g., Arrow 1963; Sen 1970, 1977, 1995; Mackie 2003; Riker 1982; Hardin 1990.

³¹ For the same point, see Brighouse & Fleurbaey 2008, p. 1.

³² See also Riker 1982.

³³ Brighouse & Fleurbaey 2005.

interests are affected by the decision.³⁴ Of course, with this ideal, all the issues that we mentioned above regarding what kind of influence we should care about, and how it should be measured, becomes pertinent.

As the discussion of the All Affected Principle indicates, Proportionalism might not be such a radical departure from actual democratic practices as it might initially appear. Taken literally, the “one person, one vote” slogan would mean that everybody should have the same say on every issue. But we do not think that the curriculum imposed by the School board of Waco, Texas, is any business of Icelanders since they are not relevantly affected by this decision. Likewise, people in Luleå (far up north in Sweden) should not, in most cases, have much of a say on how the public transportation is organized in Stockholm, e.g., whether to increase the number of buses to a certain suburb. However, what kind of hair spray the teachers use in Waco might be the business of Icelanders too, e.g., if the hair spray used destroys the ozone-layer. Moreover, whether state tax revenue should be used to subsidise the public transportation system in Stockholm is arguably something that the people in Luleå, qua taxpayers, should have an input on.

According to Proportionalism, how much influence you ought to have over an issue depends on how much your interests are at stake. We approximate this by having different issues handled on different levels: councils, province, state, European, etc. Again, the subsidiarity principle is in one of its popular interpretations --- “decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen” --- very much along the lines of the All Affected Principle and Proportionalism. The general prescription is that a certain type of issue should be handled by the democratically run body that represents the social union that best approximates the set of affected people.

An exciting aspect of replacing the equality principle with Proportionalism is that many important difficulties associated with the standard egalitarian and majoritarian view of democracy mentioned above are dissolved or are substantially alleviated by this alternative approach, or so it seems. For example, the tyranny of the majority, where some basic rights of the minority are violated by majoritarian decisions, might just be a case of incorrect distribution of voting rights (or some other power resource) since the minority’s interests are, arguably, much more at stake in such cases than the majority’s interests. Indeed, violations of individual human rights, such as the right to life and security of person, are acts that have such dramatic effects on people’s interests that we may think that no group has the right to decide that a person should be subjected to

³⁴ Arrhenius (2005, 2011a); Brighouse & Fleurbaey (2008). For a discussion of several versions of the All Affected Principle, see my (2011b).

them against her will. As we suggested above, we can conceive of this as the individual being a sovereign and that she has a veto right against other people's wills in such cases. Moreover, with Proportionalism at the kernel of our theory of democracy, there might be no incompatibility between our intuitions regarding the necessity of majority rule over certain issues and individual rights. Hence, the presumed classical conflict between liberalism and democracy might just be based on a flawed conceptualisation of democracy.

As this discussion indicates, democracy as fair distribution of power makes the scope of democracy much greater than usually perceived – it ranges from questions that affect everybody to questions that affect only one person. Not only can it explain our intuitions regarding the necessity of global governance of certain issues, for example environmental problems, but also human rights. Consequently, the third departure from conventional theories of democracy is that democracy is applicable not only in the political arena but in all contexts of decision-making.

Lastly, the almost exclusive focus in recent normative political theory on the distribution of goods like material resources, welfare, capabilities, primary goods and the like is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. A dimension of justice which these theories don't pay sufficient attention to is the distribution of power in the different spheres of life, including firms and workshops, the family (as often pointed out by feminist theorists),³⁵ and private associations. This approach neglects how inescapable power issues are in all aspects of our lives.³⁶ Democracy as fair distribution of power may remedy this unsatisfactory situation as well as generating new interesting solutions to classical problems in democratic theory.³⁷

³⁵ See e.g., Okin (1989); Mackinnon (1987).

³⁶ For the same point, see Brighouse & Fleurbaey (2005).

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