

Democracy Unbound—A Multidisciplinary Research Project

1. Purpose and Goals

In the last decades, we have witnessed the emergence of powerful supranational institutions in the political sphere. This development provides a response to problems that are difficult to handle at the national level. However, it might be held that its adequacy depends on the extent to which the institutions are democratic, or constrained by democratic decision-making processes. Indeed, it has been suggested that we should ultimately strive for a *global* democratic government, and that the development of bodies such as the EU is justified since it provides a step in that direction.

Proposals of this kind provide the focus of our research project. Some of the questions they raise are *normative*. For example, what *form* of democracy, if any, should we try to bring about at a supranational level? After all, there are different notions of democracy, some of which are more demanding than others, e.g., regarding the participation and influence of the citizens. The significance of this question is illustrated by the ongoing debate about the appropriate role of the European Parliament within the EU. Other questions are empirical, and rather concern the *possibility* of a successful implementation of democratic institutions at a supranational level. Thus, the main objection to the idea of a global democracy has been, not that it is undesirable, but that it is utopian and unrealistic.

In order to assess objections of this kind we need to identify obstacles as well as factors that could prove favorable relative to the aim of bringing about a genuine supranational democracy. For example, we need to survey the legal situation. To what extent do international conventions and laws already bind us? Might the existing legal framework contribute to the establishment of a global democracy? We also need to consider people's attitudes and beliefs. The feasibility of attempts to implement democratic institutions at a supranational level is likely to be affected by the extent to which they can gain support from the citizens. This in turn will depend on the nature of the institutions. For example, on one hypothesis, the support such institutions will command depends whether they allow citizens to influence the decisions rather directly. However, there may also be considerations indicating that successful supranational institutions must be designed so as to make the influence quite indirect, considerations having to do with their efficiency. This provides a problem for the advocates of supranational forms of democracy: How should the institutions be designed so that they will both be efficient and at the same time such that they are able to command general support from the citizens? As for factors that may be favorable, we will concentrate on two examples; the emergence of the internet as a tool for mass communication, and the existence of a community that is already highly internationalized and at the same time deeply affects many political decisions, namely scientific expertise.

A serious assessment of these questions requires collaboration between researchers from several different fields. The project group is formed so as to meet this demand. It involves researchers from four different fields: Philosophy, Law, History and Psychology. The aim of the project is simply to provide an answer to the two central questions. Is it possible to bring about genuine democracy at a supranational level, and is it desirable? A secondary aim is to establish enduring forms of collaboration between the disciplines represented in the project.

2. Relevant Research

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the project, the relevant literature and research situation is heterogeneous. There is one literature relevant to the normative questions, another pertinent to the legal situation. The following account of the relevant research will therefore be divided into three subsections: Philosophy, Law, and Psychology.

2.1 Philosophy

Many of the particular normative issues that we will focus on have not been widely discussed within philosophy, and the relevant literature consists of texts that address very fundamental questions in democratic theory. In the case of the idea of a global democracy, however, there has been an intense debate, and the contributions to this debate are highly relevant to our concerns. The debate about "cosmopolitanism", in a strong sense implying world government has been pursued at least since the 17th century. During the twentieth century many theorists have added that the government should be democratic. Examples of theorists that have participated in the debate are Jeremy Bentham, A.C. Ewing, David Held, Immanuel Kant, Hans Kelsen, Kai Nielsen and Torbjörn Tännsjö, Recent contributions include Held 1995, Zolo 1997, and Archibugi 1998, but see also Dahl 1989, Singer 2002, Steiner 1999 and Tännsjö 1992.

2.2 Law

One aim of this project is to determine the extent to which we are already bound by legal conventions and laws, regardless of nationality. These are questions addressed within public international law. A general discussion is pursued in Koskenniemi 1989. As for the relationship between EC- and EU-law and the legal orders of the Member States, this is discussed in MacCormick 1999, Weiler 1999, and Zetterquist 2002. Examples of studies of the constitutional role of the European Court of Justice are Rasumussen 1986 and Hartley 1998. As for Swedish literature, see in particular Lundström 1999 and Wiklund 1997.

2.3 Psychology

The possibility of a successful implementation of democratic institutions at a supranational level also raises psychological questions, since the success of these institutions are likely to be affected by the extent to which they command support from the citizens. This in turn depends on people's basic attitudes and beliefs about democracy. To explore such issues provides therefore a part of the present project. The previous psychological research has consistently demonstrated that although members of the mass public generally express strong support for democratic principles in the abstract, they are unwilling to apply these principles in practice. Other studies have shown that political activists endorse both the abstract principles and specific applications of democracy to a larger extent than the general public (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). However, the findings have not been consistent, showing that the gap in opinions of both groups is often overestimated and that there exist significant differences of opinions within the elites (Finkel, Sigelman, & Humphries, 1999). Further research is needed comparing the opinions both within and between the groups of voters and politicians to understand under which conditions the differences occur and what are the implications of such differences for practical implementation of democratic principles. However, much relevant research has already been carried about, e.g., about how the perceptions of collective opinion strongly influence personal opinions of individuals (see Mutz, 1998), about how accurate voters are in perceiving the opinions of their peers, members of various political groups or separate politicians (Dimdins, Montgomery, & Austers, 2003), and about how people's public behavior tends to reflect the misperceived norm rather than actors' private attitudes and that people's private attitudes with time tend to gravitate towards the misperceived norm (Miller, Monin, & Prentice, 2000). Misperceptions of groups' attitudes and opinions have been shown to lead to conflicts between groups, as well as to complicate the resolution of such conflicts. Taken together these findings suggest that perceptions of peer political beliefs and attitudes may have significant consequences for political behavior and need to be researched further in this particular context.

3. Plan of the Project

The questions that will be addressed in the project can be divided into two main categories. The first category includes questions about the desirability of the emergence of supranational, democratically governed, bodies and institutions. The second includes questions that concern the possibility of implementing democracy at that level. Under each of these major headings, a number of subprojects will be presented. However, there is a great deal of overlap, which motivates extensive collaboration within the entire research group.

3.1. Desirability

3.1.1. The Boundary Problem

What institutions ought to be run democratically? Who should take part in which decision-making processes? This problem—let us call it the "boundary problem"—is a central question for democratic theory. There are many different notions of democracy. However, all traditional notions have one thing in common: a reference to a community of individuals, a "demos" who is, in some sense, collectively self-governing. Still, as Robert Dahl (1970) 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" (cf. Dahl 1989).

The boundary problem provides the focus of one of the subprojects. According to one of the ideas that will be pursued, the problem of determining the relevant "demos" may be decided with reference to a principle that we call "the all affected principle". The all affected principle entails that all persons that are relevantly affected by a decision ought to have, in some sense, influence over it. This idea is perhaps implicit in the phrase "government by the governed" or as Lincoln once expressed it: "A government of the people by the same people" (quoted from Naess 1956). The all affected principle seems to make 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. Moreover, the all affected principle gives support to the idea that all social unions are candidates for democratic rule (Cunningham 1987, p. 51). At the same time, however, it raises many questions. For example, should "relevantly affected" be spelled out in terms of people's well-being, preferences or interests or in some other way? Moreover, what should we do with "nosy" or "meddlesome" preferences (Sen 1970, 1982)? Although some preferences we have for how other people lead their lives (e.g., their use of cars) seem to be legitimate from a democratic perspective and therefore should be counted, other seem not. This is an all the more pressing question for democracy in today's multicultural society since competing and incompatible views on how to lead one's life have to be able to co-exist. Further questions concern when can we say that a person has had influence over a decision. Here we need an analysis of "influence" and "power".

3.1.2. Freedom and Equality

The boundary problem is just one example of the normative questions that we have to face when pondering democracy at a supranational level. Other questions concern other aspects regarding the design of democratic institutions at that level. How should the citizens' influence be channeled? How much of a direct influence should we allow for? Answering such questions requires that we take a new look at the basic arguments for democracy. The second subproject aims to consider two of those arguments. One of them appeals to the value of *equality*, the other to the value of *freedom* or *autonomy*.

For example, according to the traditional conception of political freedom, it consists in the absence of external obstacles to a person's agency. A person is free, on this view, insofar as no one else actively interferes in her life (see, e.g., Berlin 1969). However, an alternative

notion has recently been put forward; freedom as non-domination (Pettit 1999, Pettit 2001a and Pettit 2001b). According to this notion, political freedom is primarily a matter of power relations. A person is free, it is held, to the extent that she is not dominated by others; that is, to the extent that no one else is capable of exercising arbitrary power over her. This idea goes back to a classical republican tradition, as expressed in the writings of thinkers such as Cicero, Machiavelli and Harrington (see Skinner 2001, and Springborg 2001).

On the basis of this ideal, it might be argued that government power is necessary in order to restrict the arbitrary power that individuals might otherwise possess over others. In the present context, this type of reasoning can be used as an argument for supranational arrangements, since they may be crucial in order to block illegitimate dominance relations between states.

3.1.3. Global Democracy

The third subproject is devoted to the idea of a democratic world government. Three main positions have emerged. First, there are those who advocate a democratic world government (Ewing, Nielsen, Tännsjö). Second, there are those who think that there are better options (Kant, Bentham), such as, for example, that the problems facing humanity should be solved through peaceful negotiation between sovereign nation states. Third, there is the compromise position, according to which we should seek to establish a kind of confederation between states with shared sovereignty, where different decisions are taken at different levels. The ambitious aim of this subproject is to adjudicate between these three positions.

Well-known objections to the idea of global democracy are the argument from communitarianism and the argument from lack of true economic integration in the world. The obvious argument in favor is the need for global solutions to an increasing amount of problems, such as environmental problems. However, other arguments rather appeal to ideas about global justice, as stressed by authors such as Singer, Unger, Pogge, and Steiner (see, e.g., Singer 2001 and Steiner 1999). One important factor that shall be considered, and that relates to the boundary problem, is the assumed jurisdiction of a world government. What kinds of decisions belong to which level of decision-making in a pluralistic world aiming at (a sense of) community? Another crucial question is what kind of democracy is preferable? Is a strong "populist" democracy necessary? Or, is a weaker democracy of Schumpeter's variety sufficient? Or should we prefer a "deliberative" conception, according to which democracy ideally is form of collective decision-making that makes the decisions the outcome of a process of public deliberation in which everyone is invited to participate on free and equal terms? ((This approach comes in different varieties. See, e.g., Benhabib 1996, Cohen 1997, and Habermas 1997). And, finally, should a world government at *all* be democratic?

3.2. Feasibility

3.2.1. The Legal Situation

Although some objections to the idea of a global democracy concern the desirability of such a government, the main objection is that it is utopian. A response to this objection (c.f. Tännsjö, forthcoming) is that people on the globe are already to a large extent world citizens. We are all bound, individually, by many laws enacted through all sorts of international covenants. For example, there is the UN charter on human rights, the Charters of the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals, and the Helsinki Declaration. In the EU, there is the European Convention on Human Rights, which has a central role in the Draft Constitution for the EU.

In order to assess this response, we need to survey the legal situation, which is the aim of the fourth subproject. What is the status of the various international charters, conventions and courts? From what source do they derive their legitimacy? The latter question raises central issue within public international law. For example there is a deep controversy between who

think that the nation state is the only legitimate source of legal rights, and those who think there is an independent source (see Koskenniemi 1999).

3.2.2. The Psychological Situation

The feasibility of attempts to implement democratic institutions at a supranational level will depend on the extent to which they can gain support from the citizens. This in turn will depend on people's basic attitudes and values. In order to determine the feasibility of attempts to bring about supranational forms of democracy we need a clearer picture about these attitudes and beliefs. To provide such a picture is the aim of the fifth subproject

We will gather data from three groups of respondents. First, the survey will include a representative sample of Swedish voters. The second sample will include Swedish politicians. This sample will be stratified to include representatives from all levels of government (municipal, regional, national) and from the whole political spectrum. Third, the survey will include a sample of political experts--political scientists, philosophers, sociologists, and lawyers from various universities. The method of the data gathering will be a questionnaire survey. The three samples will be surveyed with the same set of questions, requiring the participants to (a) express their own opinions about various democracy-related concepts, and (b) to predict the answers of the other two groups to the same questions. The members of the research that will work within this subproject have successfully used this research design in previous studies of intergroup perception with various samples.

3.2.3. The Internet and Democracy

One consideration that has recently prompted much optimism about the project of establishing democracy at a global or supranational level is the emergence of the internet. The internet provides a vehicle for mass communication and political participation on a scale exceeding anything national governments have yet been able to achieve. The aim of the sixth subproject is to consider to what extent there is ground for this optimism, especially against the background of a "deliberative" conception of democracy. Factors that indicate that the internet might help us to achieve this ideal include the fact that it enables small interest groups and minorities to find and communicate with each other, and that it allows individuals and smaller groups with fewer resources to present their points of view to a large number of people.

3.2.4 Expertise Unbound

The point of departure of the seventh subproject is the existence of a highly internationalized community or group that have a crucial influence over many political decisions, namely scientific experts. Since many of present-day environmental problems and engineering projects can only be solved or carried out through international cooperation, experts can be identified as a crucial actor group that have large interests in promoting the internationalisation of political decision-making. The purpose of the subproject "Expertise Unbound" is to find out what features of the open and hidden agendas of expertise that have been guiding them in their actions for solving scientific problems and executing engineering projects of international scope. How are these features related to the internationalisation of democratic decision-making processes?

4. International relations

The project involves a number of prominent "reference persons", who have accepted to be available for consultation. The group of reference persons include Sven Danielsson (Uppsala), Bob Goodin (RSSH, Australian National University), Philip Pettit (Princeton University), Carole Pateman (UCLA), Frank Cunningham (University of Toronto), Andreas Føllesdal

(University of Oslo), Jörgen Hermansson (University of Uppsala), Lena Halldenius (Lund University), and David Held (London School of Economics).

5. Gender Perspective

Gender inequality is a persistent feature of the public and policy-making spheres. This inequality (as well as its causes) is naturally relevant both to questions concerning the desirability and the feasibility of attempts to bring about genuine democracy at a supranational level. It will therefore be considered within all subprojects. For example, gender disparities in the division of household tasks and responsibilities still hamper women's participation in political activities. This affects the likelihood of achieving, e.g., the ideal of democracy as a form of decision-making in which everyone is invited to participate on free and equal terms. On the other hand, it is conceivable that the development of supranational, democratic bodies may provide an adequate response to gender inequality in the political arena, since it may be instrumental in fighting the socio-cultural prejudices that provide the main constraints to women's participation in the political sphere in many countries.

We also want to point to the fact that practical philosophy (to which political philosophy belongs) in Sweden is an area where women are extremely underrepresented. In recent times, only a few women have earned a doctorate of practical philosophy, two of them in political philosophy. Both these women (May Thorseth and Lena Halldenius) are involved in the project, Thorseth as a member of the group of researchers and Halldenius as a member of the reference group. Moreover, one of the graduate students who will be employed within the project is also a woman (Anna Petré). The project can therefore be expected to support the development towards gender equality in the discipline of practical philosophy in Sweden.

6. Preliminary Results

Some of the researchers of the group have already made important contributions to the discussion of the questions that will be addressed. For example, Torbjörn Tännsjö (who will work within subproject 3.1.3) addresses global democracy already in Tännsjö 1992, and has recently written a paper that defends the idea and is scheduled to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Tidskrift för politisk filosofi*. Moreover, Gustaf Arrhenius (who will work within 3.1.1) defends the all affecting principle in a paper that has been submitted to an international philosophy journal. Ola Zetterquist's project (3.2.1) is a natural extension of the research that resulted in his doctoral dissertation. And Girts Dimdins and Henry Montgomery (who will work within 3.2.2) have tried out the method they plan to use extensively in previous studies.

7. Significance of the Project

Given the fact that many of the issues represent "virgin ground", and given the previously shown competence represented in the group, it is not unreasonable to have high hopes about the likelihood of important results being produced within the project. However, part of the significance that the project might have is that it may contribute to the development of enduring forms of collaboration between the disciplines regarding the relevant questions.

8. Participants (in alphabetic order)

Gustaf Arrhenius is a Research Fellow at the Department of Philosophy, Stockholm University. He has written extensively on our moral obligations to future generations, applying the methods of social choice and game theory. Arrhenius will work within subproject 3.1.1.

Girts Dimdins defended his doctoral thesis in psychology at Stockholm University in January 2004. His research deals with biases in intergroup perception. Dimdins will be employed within the project (50%) and will work within subproject 3.2.2.

Thomas Kaiserfeld (b. 1964), Ph.D. in the History of Technology from the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, is currently holding a four-year research position (forskarassistenttjänst) funded by The Swedish Research Council. His research is devoted to the long-term development of the use of expertise in political decision-making. Kaiserfeld will work within 3.2.4.

Magnus Jiborn is a Research Fellow at the Department of Philosophy at Lund University. His doctoral dissertation, *Voluntary Coercion*, examines the idea of a social contract from a game-theoretical point of view. Jiborn will work within subproject 3.1.2, and he will be employed within the project (50%).

Henry Montgomery is professor of cognitive psychology at Stockholm University. His research interests include mental processes and structures associated with people's values, attitudes, and decisions. Montgomery will work within subproject 3.2.2.

Paulo de Narvaja is a graduate student of philosophy at Stockholm University. He will work within the subproject 3.2.1, under the supervision of Tersman. De Narvaja will be employed within the project (100%).

Joakim Nergelius. LL.D., professor of law at Örebro University, Sweden since 2003. His main areas of research are within constitutional law and EU law. Nergelius will work within subproject 3.2.1.

Aleksander Peczenik. is Professor of Jurisprudence and Law-and-Computers, Lund University Faculty of Law, Sweden, since 1978, and Samuel Pufendorf Research Professor since 2003. Peczenik will work within subproject 3.2.1.

Anna Petrén will be employed within the project as a graduate student. Petrén will work within subproject 3.1.3, under the supervision of Tännsjö. Petrén will be employed within the project (100%).

Folke Tersman (main applicant) is a Professor of Practical Philosophy at Stockholm University. He has focused mainly on the possibility of rational argumentation over evaluative issues, and his publications include articles in *Erkenntnis*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Theoria*, and *Synthese*. He is the editor-in-chief of *Tidskrift för politisk filosofi*, a Swedish journal of political philosophy. Tersman will be employed within the project (50%), and will work within subproject 3.1.2.

May Thorseth, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Department of Philosophy, and the manager of Programme for Applied Ethics at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU. She will work within subproject 3.2.3.

Torbjörn Tännsjö is Professor of Practical Philosophy at Stockholm University. Tännsjö will work within subproject 3.1.3, in part by supervising Petrén's graduate studies.

Ola Zetterquist (born 1968) is an associate professor at the Faculty of Law of Lund University, Sweden. His main fields of teaching and research are EC-law, Human Rights law and questions of legal philosophy connected to constitutional theory..

9. References

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