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MÜNCHEN

INFORMED CHOICES, INCLUSIVE VOICES: EPISTEMIC JOURNEYS IN DEMOCRATIC DECISION MAKING

POPULISTS AND DEWEYITES

.....
EPISTEMIC DEMOCRACY THROUGH THE POLITICAL SCIENCE LENS

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JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

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general will on an object of common interest.



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There's no such thing as a general will!

Riker, William H. (1982). *Liberalism Against Populism*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

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JOSHUA COHEN

Well maybe we can think of it in epistemic terms, as
some sort of ideal that group decisions are trying to
approximate.



Cohen, J. (1986). *An Epistemic Conception of Democracy*. *Ethics*, 97(1), 26–38.

Let's unpack this.



The law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to contribute personally, or through their representatives, to its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes.

Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen, 1789

DIDEROT

Everything you conceive, everything you contemplate, will be good, great, elevated, sublime, if it accords with the *general and common interest*.



There is no quality essential to your species apart from that which you demand from all your fellow men to ensure your happiness and theirs...

[D]o not ever lose sight of it, or else you will find that your comprehension of the notions of goodness, justice, humanity and virtue grow dim.

Say to yourself often, “I am a man, and I have no other truly inalienable natural rights except those of humanity.”

What does social choice have to do with anything?

CONDORCET

Majority rule can produce preference cycles.



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KENNETH ARROW

These can't be avoided, even if we use some other (reasonable) voting rule.

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WILLIAM H. RIKER

There you go. The group can't be thought of as a rational agent with a 'will'.





JOSHUA COHEN

Not so fast!

JOSHUA COHEN

... one version of populism that survives Riker's criticism has a two-tier structure.



The general will is characterized in terms of an ideal procedure of deliberation or collective choice...

while democratic decision making is construed as an imperfect procedure which, when suitably organized, has the property of providing evidence about how best to achieve the object of the general will.

Cohen, J. (1986). *An Epistemic Conception of Democracy*. *Ethics*, 97(1), 26–38.

This is (maybe) how Rousseau et al originally intended the notion of a general will.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

As long as several men assembled together consider themselves as a single body, they have only one will which is directed towards their common preservation and general well-being.



Then, all the animating forces of the state are vigorous and simple, and its principles are clear and luminous; it has no incompatible or conflicting interests; the common good makes itself so manifestly evident that only common sense is needed to discern it.

Peace, unity and equality are the enemies of political sophistication. Upright and simple men are difficult to deceive precisely because of their simplicity; stratagems and clever arguments do not prevail upon them, they are not indeed subtle enough to be dupes.

How do we get to this general will, i.e., what's best for everyone?

F. A. HAYEK
Let's set up a market!



ELIZABETH ANDERSON

Well, for problems that require collective action within the bounds of the law, we're better off with debate and voting.

Anderson, E. (2006). The epistemology of democracy. *Episteme*, 3, 8–22.

How do we organize this?

CONDORCET
Votes! Votes for everything!



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Diverse problem solvers!



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ELIZABETH ANDERSON
Sounds better!



BINA AGARWAL

Kind of the community forestry groups (CFGs) in India and Nepal work!