

Theorising the Democratic State

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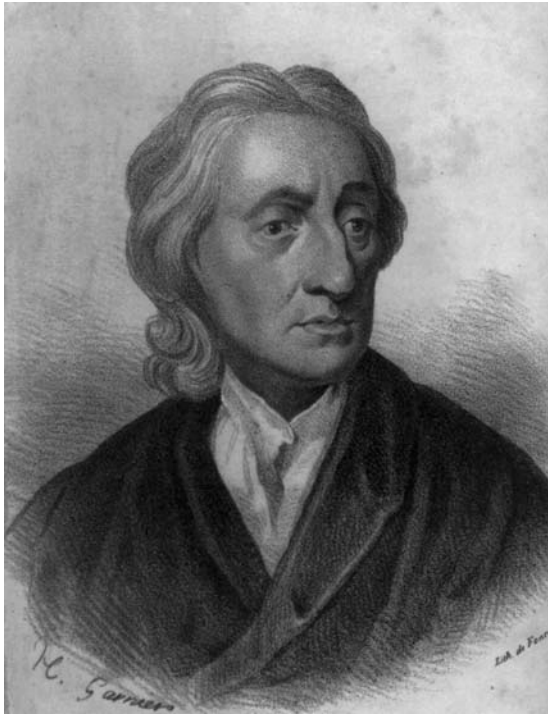
Lecture 2

Majorities and Representation

The Majoritarian Principle:

In a situation of disagreement between alternatives, the alternative that has the support of the majority should be agreed upon.

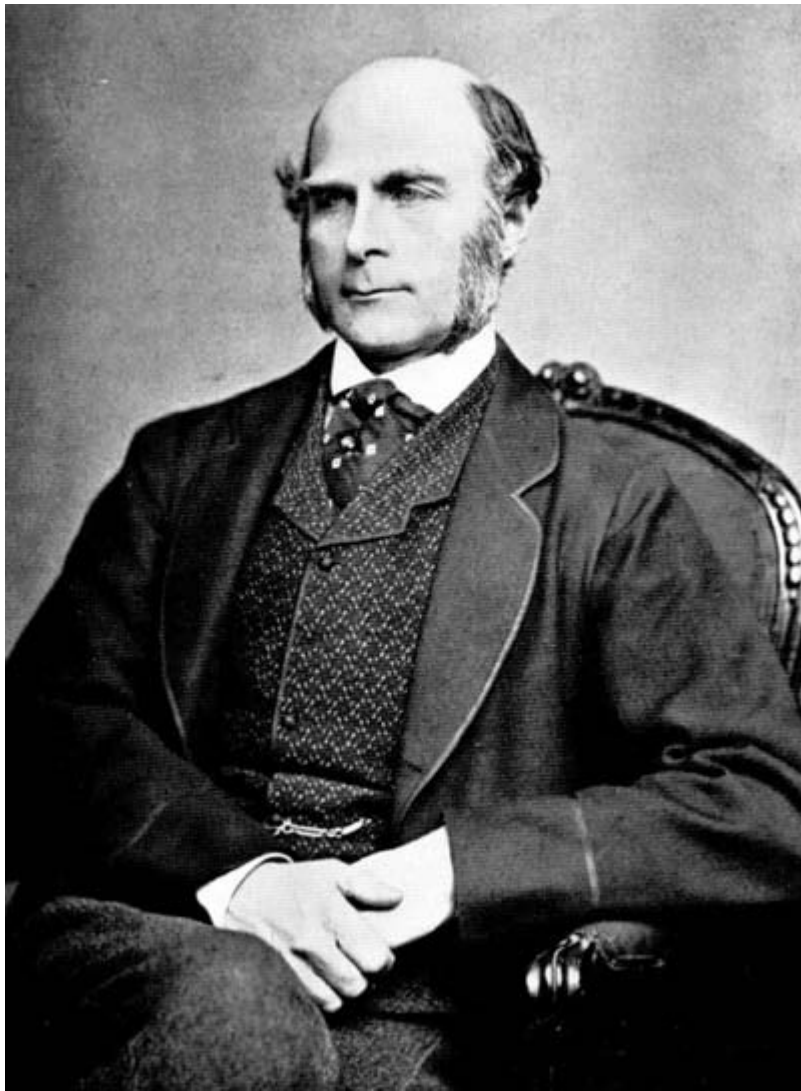
(not because everyone favours it, but just because the majority favour it)



John Locke 1632-1704

2nd Treatise on Government: ch VIII para 96:

For when any number of Men have, by the consent of every individual, made a *Community*, they have thereby made that *Community* one Body, with a Power to Act as one Body, which is only by the will and determination of the *majority*. For that which acts any Community, being only the consent of the individuals of it, and it being necessary to that which is one body to move one way; it is necessary the body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the *consent of the majority*: ...



**Francis Galton 1822-
1911**

In a ‘guess the weight’ competition the average (median) guess is accurate. This is a partial vindication of ‘vox populi’ and ‘democracy’:

‘This result is, I think, more credible to the trustworthiness of a democratic judgement than might have been expected’.

Francis Galton ‘Vox Populi’ Nature vol 75 no.1949 pp 450-451 March 1907



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

1712-1778

Social Contract BkIII ch6 para8: 'In Republics the public voice almost never elevates to the highest places any but enlightened and capable men who occupy them with honour: whereas those who succeed in monarchies are most often nothing but petty bunglers, petty knaves, petty schemers whose petty talents which at Court give access to high places only serve to show the public their ineptitude just as soon as they have acceded to these high places'.

BkIV ch1 para1: Upright and simple men are difficult to deceive because of their simplicity, they are not taken in by sham and special pleading

Justifications of Majoritarianism:

1. The majority judgement is likely to be right

Objections

- 1. Majority judgements can be absolutely wrong ethically;**
- 2. Political discussion and decision making involves persuasion in conditions of uncertainty and deep disagreement**
- 3. There are frequently more than two alternatives, hence strict majoritarianism fails**

Justifications of Majoritarianism:

1. The majority judgement is likely to be right: *an epistemic justification*

(epistemology: philosophy of knowledge)

2. We have to have some way of making decisions: *a procedural justification*

Alternative procedures:

For example

- Lot
- Gerontocracy (OED: the system of government by old men)
- Turn taking
- Negotiation to consensus

Justifications of Majoritarianism:

Procedural justifications:

- 1.in terms of quality of decisions made by this procedure
- 2.in terms of tradition: '*this is our procedure*'

Problems to come back to

- 1. An individual could still be justified in not abiding by an agreement reached by majority – for example for strategic reasons in order to get the majority to change its mind**
- 2. If a decision making procedure does not generate a majority decision, is democracy thereby failed?**



Representation and Representativeness

Lot and democracy:

*Statistical
representativeness*

*People who are
governed also govern*

Election and aristocracy:

Election and elitism

*A particular kind/class of
persons are selected for
government*

Representation

Statistical representativeness:

- *a lot of people statistically representative of us to represent us;*
- *someone like me to stand in for me*

Election: *who would I prefer to fill this post?*

- **Some one I find emotionally attractive?**
- **Some one whose policy arguments I find persuasive?**
- **Some one from my party**
- **Some one from my social group**
- **Some one from my geographical area**

Representation

Symbolising: being a representation of

Acting for: acting on behalf of; standing in for

*To delegate: to send some one to do a job;
a delegate: one who is sent*

A delegate has the powers of the sender: may be instructed, may have discretion

Following the instructions of (mandate)

Acting in the interests of, exercising discretion and judgement (authorisation and agency)

Problem

The aggregation problem:

*whichever of these bases of
representation we take
there can be no valid inference to
coincidence of beliefs or interests
between all those represented*

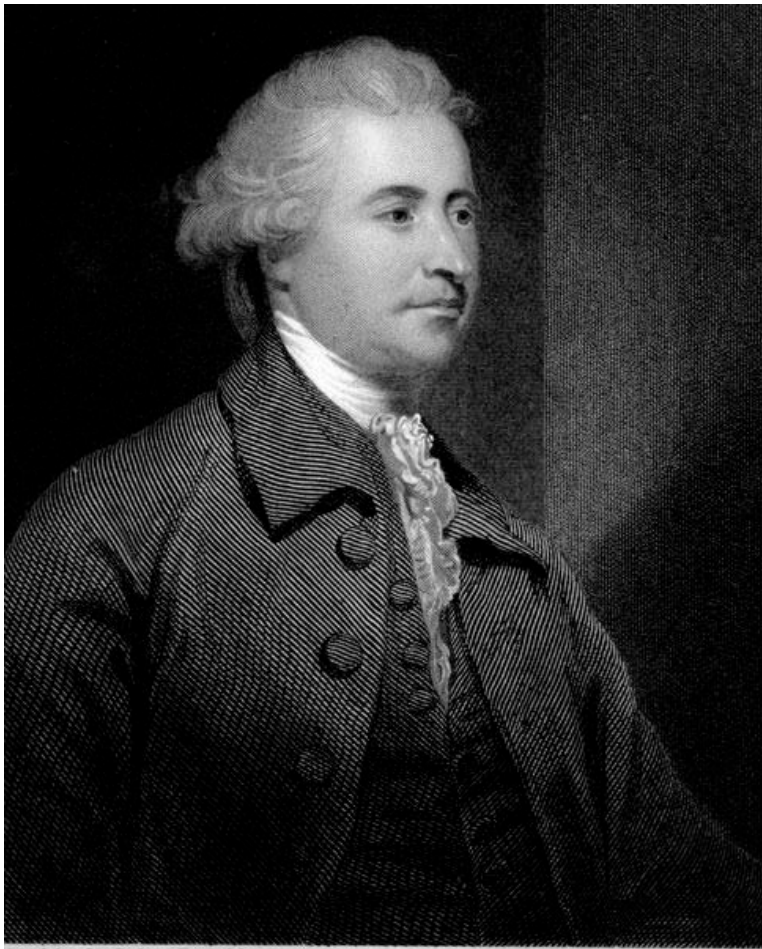
Is 'Representation' a fiction?

Problem

The claim problem :

All acts or speech or states of being by a representative vis a vis the represented are claims to represent

Is 'Representation' a fiction?



Edmund Burke
1729-1797

Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion. Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament.

Speech to the Electors of Bristol 1774



**Catharine Macaulay 1731-
1791**

If Burke's theory of representation is correct

..... Why do we have elections at all?

..... Why don't we get the monarch and Lords to choose our parliament?

There is a native right in the social body to choose its own government

[On Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution, 1790]

