

Generative Democracy

New Foundations for Democratic Theory

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Abstract

This book presents a new framework for democratic theory and institutional design, directed at political theorists, philosophers, economists, and others. In this framework, a value theory of institutions has three layers: a principle of evaluation, an analysis of institutions, and a resulting evaluation of institutions. Armed with this framework, we recast established approaches, such as Proceduralism, Instrumentalism, and Epistemism, as value theories of institutions. We identify a fundamental dilemma for institutional design: should one focus on how institutions fit people’s psychology, or on how institutions change people’s psychology? Current theorising and modelling lean to the former, often ignoring psychological change altogether. However, psychological reactions to institutions are central causes of institutional failures and the current ‘democratic crisis’. Theorising and modelling cannot ignore this. We thus introduce a new theory for evaluating and ultimately choosing institutions: Generativism. Generativism takes psychological reactions seriously when assessing the performance of institutions. This leads to a ‘generative’ defence of democracy: suitably designed democratic social orders induce more fruitful mental changes than rival social orders. We also present a formal analysis that shows how mental change can be incorporated into models of institutions. After defining a general formal framework for evaluating institutions, we present generative versions of two established research programmes: mechanism design theory in economics and epistemic social choice theory.

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