
This essay volume is a truly “mixed blessing”. The papers reach from the brilliant to the bad, the authors from the famous to the virtually unknown, the political positions from the classical liberal to the rather left, the disciplines from economics over political science, law and sociology to political philosophy. Such heterogeneity may have some merit with respect to a topic like “the future of democracy”, provided that the quality of papers is consistently high. To secure that a considerable editing effort would have been necessary. That editing has, however, been light is indicated already by the high number of “typos” and other formal mistakes. To give just a few examples, on page 66 we find the statement that “the crucial words are italicized” and there are no italics. On page 108 matrix cell III is numbered “II”, which is obvious, but later on (p. 113) in referring to the matrix, cells “VII” and “VIII” are mixed up, too, which is worse. In one reference section Binmore is replaced by Baurmann and so is Brennan (p. 126), etc.

Approaching the volume on “the future of democracy” in a selective way the reader may, nevertheless, find some rewarding readings starting with the scholarly introduction by Ernesto Garzón Valdés. An obvious next choice is Buchanan’s paper on “normative presuppositions of democracy” (pp. 49–59). It begins with the presumption “that politics is the institutional form through which individuals seek to advance their own value attainment through joint or collective action, as opposed to separated or private actions” (p. 50). If we would take Buchanan by his word here then any collective action like the formation of the Tampere Club would be politics. To avoid absurdity we have to read Buchanan normatively as saying that “regardless of whether or not the activity of politics is or is not democratic” (p. 50) it should be to the mutual advantage of all concerned. The open issue is, of course, whether we can expect democratic politics to be such that it shares the exchange characteristics of a club.

After pointing out some of the conditions that must hold for this to be the case and acknowledging that as a matter of fact it may not, Buchanan states that his “argument is that, nonetheless and regardless of what may be observed, we must, within limits of course, proceed as if the presuppositions are satisfied” (p. 55).

Well, must we and where and when? The tension with Buchanan’s favorite citation from Hume “that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing
the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be
supposed a knave and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private
interest” (Hume, 1985: VI/I, 42) is obvious. Is the assumption that the pre-
suppositions of democracy are fulfilled compatible with the assumption of
knavery?

Hume says, too, that “it appears somewhat strange, that a maxim should
be true in politics, which is false in fact” (Hume, 1985: VI/I, 42–43). The
norm that “we must, within limits” form contractarian democratic theories
based on the assumption that the presuppositions of democracy apply can
be justified either regardless of the empirical consequences of such kinds
of theory formation (i.e., because they are true in fact or because a non-
consequentialist norm that one should assume them to be true applies) or
it involves an empirical causal claim that forming such theories has better
consequences in practice than sticking to factual truth in theory formation.
As far as the latter is concerned, assuming in theory that the presuppositions
of constitutional democracy are satisfied need not bring them closer to being
satisfied in practice. As far as the former is concerned, that we, in forming
democratic theories, should follow Kantian ideals regardless of both the truth
of the theories and of the consequences of holding those theories may be
claimed but is quite implausible from the point of view of a “worldly philo-
sopher of politics” like Buchanan. Beyond the preceding more philosophical
issues Buchanan’s paper raises the much neglected public choice theory issue
of “theory absorption” or of how ideas and the formation of in particular
certain theories of public choice might affect public choice in general and
democratic forms of “collective choice making” in particular.

The paper by Baurmann takes up the Buchanan discussion of presupposi-
tions of democracy along lines as developed in Buchanan’s and Congleton’s
Politics by Principle. Like Buchanan, Baurmann does not grant moral status
to simple majority per se; it is, in particular, not the case that the majority rule
could render results morally more acceptable solely for the reason that the
results were created in majority decision making. It is rather the other way
round that the (simple) majority rule cannot be acceptable morally (on the
level of constitutional choice) unless those who will vote under that rule can
be expected (in post-constitutional choice making) to accept certain moral
views that constrain their choices. More specifically, self-interested choice
makers would on the constitutional level of rule choice not accept the ma-
jority rule unless they would expect in-period or post-constitutional choice
makers either to have certain moral qualities (i.e., are not knaves) or have con-
straints on the scope of majority decision making imposed on them. Relating
Baurmann to Buchanan and to see where agreement ends is very interesting,
indeed.