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A Dogma of Democratic Theory and Globalization: Why Politics Need not Include Everyone it Affects

HANS AGNÉ
Stockholm University, Sweden

This article examines and questions a principle in democratic theory which has become particularly fashionable in analyses of globalization and European integration, namely that everyone affected by a decision should be able to participate in making it. It is found that this principle is too strong to fit with the meaning of democracy, leads to tautological arguments, is indeterminate in politically important cases and, if its indeterminacy is rectified, fails to support ideas of political equality and accountability. Removing this principle from the concept of democracy implies, among other things, that empirical analysis becomes more significant, indeed necessary, for assessment of effects of globalization on democracy. Parallel to the development of critical arguments is the defence of a theoretical alternative according to which the delimitation of democratic communities should be decided on the grounds of what effect it produces in terms of autonomy for everyone, those included as well as those excluded.

KEY WORDS ♦ autonomy ♦ community ♦ democracy ♦ European integration ♦ globalization ♦ inclusion

Every polity operates on a formal or informal rule specifying who can participate in the making of collective decisions and who is subject to collective action.[1] Likewise, every democratic theory must specify who should be able to participate in the making of what collective decisions for those decisions to qualify as democratic. On this point it is often assumed that democracy requires that the people affected by a decision should be able to participate in making it. This idea of democratic community or inclusiveness, which will here be referred to as the symmetry principle,

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furthermore implies an extremely strong notion of democratic political autonomy, since it requires that the people be affected *only* by such decisions as they have participated in making and, therefore, that all decisions made externally to the people must be avoided; otherwise the people will be affected by decisions that they have not participated in making.[2]

These notions of political community and autonomy would appear to have become particularly fashionable in analyses of internationalization, globalization, European integration, and similar processes (see for example Habermas, 1999: 49; Held, 1995: ix; Føllesdal, 2000: 86; Zürn, 2000: 186; Archibugi, 2004: 444). Their popularity in this context may proceed in part from the fact that, depending on what conclusions we are aiming for, they can relieve us of the burdens of empirical research, or at least obscure the significance of such analyses. If democracy is so defined as to require that people be affected only by such decisions as they have themselves participated in making, then internationalization and similar processes represent a defect in democracy by definition; for as things now stand democratic participation is limited by state boundaries, and even a minimal understanding of internationalization, globalization, or European integration implies, quantitatively or qualitatively, strengthening relations across state boundaries, thus necessarily entailing that people be affected by decisions the making of which they have had no possibility to participate in.

Nevertheless, in this article I will propose that the concepts of political autonomy and community indicated above are problematic and ill-founded and should be replaced by others serving the same purpose. The aim of my critique is to arrive at notions of democratic community and autonomy that are relieved of a certain bias towards national and domestic politics as well as of some problems of consistency, practical applicability and empirical fruitfulness, but also to pave the way for a more useful and less problematic theoretical alternative. Before developing the critique and an arguably better theoretical alternative, however, the principle under scrutiny will be described in more detail.

Symmetry between Affected and Politically Included Individuals

Let us take a few examples of how the symmetry principle has been formulated in the literature. When Michel Zürn analyses the democratic challenge of what he calls de-nationalization he suggests that the democratic process ‘consists of two components — a *democratic principle* — that is, everyone affected by a decision should have a chance to participate — and a *deliberative principle* — any decision should be backed by arguments committed to values of rationality and impartiality’ (Zürn, 2000: 186). While Zürn recognizes other attributes of democracy as well, for example personal autonomy and 'normatively justifiable solutions' (2000: 186), he does not use them to limit the scope of the symmetry principle in any way. Similarly, David Held makes a variety of suggestions for the concept of democracy while still defining his general research interest as focused on the 'challenges to *democracy* deriving, on the one hand, from the world political economy and the web of relations and networks which stretch across national borders and, on the other hand, the divergence that sometimes exists between the totality of *those affected* by a political decision and *those who participated in making it*' (Held, 1995: ix; emphasis added).

Still in the context of globalization or internationalization, but less restricted to democracy proper and more inclined in addition to consider the matter of democratic legitimacy, Jürgen Habermas contends that '[d]eficits in democratic legitimation arise whenever the set of those involved in making democratic decisions fails to coincide with the set of those affected by them' (Habermas, 1999: 49). It may also be noted that appreciation of the symmetry principle is not restricted to the field of internationalization and globalization. Arend Lijphart, to take an influential example, characterized the consensus model of democracy — as opposed to majority rule — by following the economist Arthur Lewis in saying that 'the primary meaning of democracy is that "all who are affected by a decision should have the right to participate in making that decision"' (Lijphart, 1984: 21).

While there is no necessity in premising theories of democracy on the symmetry principle, it is incontestable that some influential writers, especially on the topic of global or transnational democracy, have been inclined to do so. Hence if we are to think seriously about processes of internationalization in the light of democratic concerns, it may be worth subjecting this particular conception of democracy to scrutiny and inquiring whether a better one can be found.

To describe the principle in greater detail one may separate its two main concepts — the capacity of individuals to participate in collective decision-making and the effects of collective decision-making on individuals. These two concepts could each be understood as dichotomous (either you can participate or you cannot, either you are affected or you are not) or as graded qualities (to a greater or lesser extent you have the capacity to participate, to a greater or lesser extent you are affected by the collective decision). Each of the formulations of the principle listed above would appear to be dichotomous — there are no explicit arguments concerning what degree of participation should be afforded to people because of the degree to which they are affected. However, a graded interpretation does play a role, for example when the principle is used to conclude that members of a national minority should be given enhanced opportunities of political participation when deciding on issues of particular concern to them (see for example Lijphart, 1984).

In political practice the concepts of being affected and being able to participate can both take very different forms. From a standpoint of elitist democracy one might suggest that the possibility of participating in free, fair, and regularly held elections is necessary and sufficient for concluding that the individual who has that possibility also has the possibility of participating in any collective decision which is largely determined by the outcome of such elections. From a different and more participatory standpoint one might emphasize that ordinary citizens — and not just their elected representatives — should be given the right and possibility to take political initiatives, to hold politicians accountable at various stages, and ultimately to make decisions on a broad range of issues. However, the critique formulated in this article does not depend for its validity on any one such account of democratic participation being inherent in the symmetry principle. Either variant, or some other, will do.

A question with more implications in the analysis below is whether the existing level of participation in contemporary international organizations is democratically sufficient. While there is some variation among international organizations in this regard, it is contended here that they do not generally measure up to the participation requirement of the symmetry principle. This interpretation could be derived from a common position of the authors cited above. Rather than validating the democratic qualities of international organizations, these authors object to unjustified limitations in respect of participation, representation, accountability, inclusion, transparency, or public debate. Furthermore, on both elitist and participatory accounts of democracy, such objections would not appear to be unfair in response to the basic facts of international organizations today — long and complicated chains of delegation and little or no political power held by directly elected assemblies; meetings behind closed doors and very little debate among the people of the organization as a whole; widely diffused veto powers which can be used to quash even the maturely deliberated, persistently maintained positions of popular majorities. Such institutions impair democratic processes even if all the states involved are themselves democratic.

As for the concept of being affected, there are even fewer qualifications in the literature of the symmetry principle. At the level of the definitions cited above no distinctions are ever made between effects which are, for example, wanted or unwanted, intended or unintended, costly or trivial, enforced or optional. Nor is the field of application restricted to any specific context, such as the politics of existing democracies rather than autocratic states or non-constituted anarchic environments, or the effects of market or state policy interaction. In relation to the last point it should be emphasized that the word ‘decision’ in the principle does not seem to indicate a delimitation of the scope of its application to politics or state action. The authors in question are just as concerned with transnational market interactions as they are with sovereignty and law. Hence the character of the symmetry principle is, according to existing formulations of it, general. Its claim to normative validity is not restricted to any one circumstance mentioned earlier but applies to all of them.[3]

A violation of the symmetry principle typically occurs when a state undergoes internationalization, globalization or any other process characterized by increasing interaction across national borders.[4] By definition, internationalization implies that citizens will increasingly affect or be affected by factors or actors outside their national boundaries and outside the direct control of their government, and hence, that an externally made policy will affect citizens who were never included in deciding on it, however democratically it may have been made with regard to the (external) citizens who were. Note that this conclusion — that internationalization, by definition, violates the symmetry principle — does not depend on a thick, or controversial, understanding of the term ‘internationalization’. To reach the conclusion we have to admit only that internationalization is — among many other things — a process in which something — anything — becomes increasingly shared among different countries, or increasingly affected across national boundaries. Hence the possible and probable contextual variation in a number of matters frequently discussed in connection with internationalization (for example, the sort of societal functions internationally affected or shared, the geographical scope of the relation, the intensity or speed of the international effect, the technical means for achieving the effect or the reasons for which the whole process started) does not affect the validity of the implication. In times of internationalization, democracy at the level of states is not a political system in which individuals affected by a public policy are generally included in the determination of that policy. Indeed, there is no way it could be so. As long as democratic participation is restricted by national boundaries, the most efficient way to approximate the symmetry principle is to set barriers between the citizenry and the outside world.

While it would seem to follow from this argument that the symmetry principle could find use as an element in nationalist theory, in the three following sections its application to democratic theory will be subject to criticism. First, it will be argued that the principle is too strong to fit with established intuitions about the meaning of democracy, as revealed by its policy recommendations when applied to some real-world examples of international relations and politics. Second, it will be argued that such democratic autonomy as the symmetry principle aims at formulating is better captured by a different concept of political autonomy, according to which people should be free and able to choose the actions by which they themselves are affected. Third, it will be argued that even the definition of democratic community, which is the major concern of the symmetry principle, is better captured by a principle that makes inclusion dependent on political autonomy as understood in the second section of the article. These conclusions, it will be contended, are sufficient to overthrow the claim that the symmetry principle has a place in the family of democratic principles — however tempting that claim may be to the nationalistically inclined. The discussion then continues with some more general and practical implications of the alternative principle. The article concludes with a summary of the argument.

No a Priori Link between Internationalization and Democracy

As already noted, some students have adopted a concept of democracy that makes an inescapable consequence of internationalization — namely that policies will affect individuals who had no democratically sufficient part in deciding on them — injurious to democracy. However, this position seems to represent a small but significant jumping to conclusions. It is not necessarily injurious to democracy that the citizens of one state affect those of another. It could well be the case that the internationalized policies of one democratic state not only benefit the citizens of that state itself, but also strengthen democracy in other states, whose citizens had nothing to do with making those policies. Let us start by considering a few examples typically ignored in arguments favouring the symmetry principle.

Recall the democratization of politics in South Africa at the beginning of the 1990s. The international community actively supported this process, using the means of diplomatic condemnation and trade embargo against the regime, and furnishing various forms of support to the pro-democratic opposition. True, the process of democratization did not start because of international pressures on the apartheid regime or international support for the opposition. But equally true, no one could claim that action on South Africa from abroad — for example financial and moral support of the African National Congress — in any way *limited* the scope of South African democracy, even though (and this is most important) no South Africans were allowed to participate in making the international decisions which would affect them. In this case the cause of democracy was furthered by the international effect — state decision-making became more inclusive and more egalitarian.

A few reflections may be needed to see the implications of this example for the tenability of the symmetry principle. Its advocates may rightly suggest that the democratically optimal course of action in this case would be to include all individuals living in South Africa equally in the political processes of that state. While this would seem to be a sound interpretation of democracy, it is somewhat aside of the problem of interest. The trouble with the symmetry principle is not that it fails to identify the most ideal state of affairs, which, of course, it does not, but rather its failure in advising democrats when confronted with the two less ideal alternatives of interfering or not with an apartheid regime. What should be of concern here is that the symmetry principle may judge it as more democratic to abstain from international action vis-a-vis the apartheid regime than to interfere with it, or at least that it may lead on to some unnecessary ambivalence with regard to regime interference in this case. Let us consider if entertaining the symmetry principle involves such a risk.

Prior to any risk is the application of the principle to a *relevant* case. But would anyone really seek to apply the symmetry principle to the case of democratic intervention in South Africa in order to conclude that such action was, because of the effect it produced, without democratic legitimation or even democratically condemnable? It should perhaps be noted that I am not concerned with whether the supporters of the symmetry principle mentioned above — Daniele Archibugi, Andreas Føllesdal, Jürgen Habermas, David Held, and Michael Zürn — were for or against this democratic intervention. The example of South Africa was my choice, not theirs. My interest is to learn about a principle, not about the persons holding it, who may or may not be aware of the full implications of their position. The concern of this analysis should hence be with explicit formulations of the symmetry principle and its use in various arguments, or the absence of such formulations and arguments, rather than with the intentions of particular persons.

In the light of such a method an earlier observation may be repeated, namely that the authors in question do not explicitly restrict the principle's scope of application. In its definition they make no qualifications concerning, for example, the effects of market or state interactions, just or unjust results, actions tending to promote or to sustain democracy. This absence would seem to imply that it is unjustifiably ad hoc suddenly to declare that a problematic case such as the South African one falls outside the principle's domain.

Moreover, it is utterly difficult, arguably impossible, to identify any relevant difference between the South African case and such international effects as arguments supportive of the symmetry principle use as illustrations. Democratic interventions share with market interactions and environmental pollution the general quality of being international relations with effects on states and individuals. More specifically, a suggestion that the symmetry principle need not be observed in relation to undemocratic countries would not do. All authors considered above use the principle to identify democratic defects in the international system, and since the international system is certainly not a democracy itself there can be nothing unorthodox about applying the symmetry principle to an undemocratic country. Furthermore, the charge that actions which promote democratization need not themselves observe any principle of democracy would not seem to do any better. It is likely, or at least it is not impossible, that the existence of totalitarian systems boosts the morale of citizens in democratic states and tends to protect the democracy in which they live. But surely it would be strange to regard totalitarian systems as for that reason democratically justifiable. So it should come as no surprise that distinctions along this line have not been suggested within the discourse of the symmetry principle. A more appropriate notion of democracy, and certainly a more parsimonious one, should simply avoid the implication that democratization from the outside is *necessarily* to some extent undemocratic.

In any case, it seems that we should reject any declaration that the symmetry principle is irrelevant to cases such as the South African one and instead acknowledge that the actions undertaken by the international community in order to democratize this country were, from the perspective yielded by the symmetry principle, democratically problematic because of the very effects of those actions. If we are disturbed by this conclusion — which most democrats would seem to be — the problem lies in the principle rather than in an unfair application.[5]

Other elements of democracy can be discerned in the case of Estonia, when it struggled for secession from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and finally became independent in August 1991. Estonia had by then been incorporated in the Soviet Union for 46 years and had as a result lost the autonomy and sovereignty it had acquired at the end of the First World War. Several states, individuals, and organizations, including elements of the mass media, applied considerable scrutiny and exerted much pressure on the Soviet Union, thereby greatly raising the potential cost faced by the Gorbachev regime — highly concerned with its reputation in the West — were it to strike back at the liberation movement with military force. Like the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the liberation movement in Estonia was not started by international pressures, and did not draw most of its dynamism from external sources. Nevertheless, these certainly played a positive part in the re-achievement of Estonian autonomy and sovereignty. To the extent that autonomy and sovereignty are important to democracy, international pressure clearly helped the cause of democracy in Estonia.

A less dramatic example could be taken from television broadcasting in border areas, for example the area encompassing southern Sweden and eastern Denmark. Danish state television reaches Swedish territory. In style and quality Danish programmes closely resemble Swedish ones, and most inhabitants of the parts of Sweden close to Denmark easily understand Danish. The fact that Danish television reaches Swedish territory is policy-determined. But while it has an impact on people on both sides of the border, for example the range of information and entertainment they can choose from, the Danes alone had a say in deciding that policy. Nevertheless, as far as one can tell, this policy of the Danish state has never been considered in any way harmful to Swedish democracy. Such an idea would be strange indeed, since the policy enriches the store of information available to Swedish citizens, and thus, if anything, is beneficial to Swedish deliberative democracy. This is but one small example of a situation which has become almost universal in the era of international broadcasting.

Examples such as these can hopefully establish as a truism that being subject to international policy — made without one's own democratically sufficient participation — is not necessarily a defect in democracy. Whether internationalization is good or bad for democracy should be judged in terms of somewhat finer categories, and one way to proceed would be to investigate what actually happens to democracy in the course of internationalization. The first step would then be to conceptualize most crucially the autonomy dimension of democracy so that its link to internationalization is empirically contingent rather than logically necessary. The next section suggests such a concept and compares it with the one inherent in the symmetry principle.

An Alternative Concept of Political Autonomy

The symmetry principle is sometimes confused with a principle of political autonomy according to which the people should be able and free to act upon themselves. These are of course two different principles. That actor A affects actor B does not by itself mean that there are fewer or less important possibilities of action available to B, nor that B is prevented from performing any particular action. The effect caused by A may indeed have been to increase B's possibilities to act freely (consider for example the possibility that one state affects another by a policy of foreign aid, and only by that policy). Hence to be affected and to have possibilities to act are best regarded as two different things.

Once this distinction is made, much of the attraction of the symmetry principle disappears. It seems that persons who say they support the symmetry principle in reality do not, but have only confused it with the notion of the freedom and ability of people to decide their own future, or have mistakenly come to believe that the symmetry principle is logically equivalent to that of political autonomy properly understood. If the symmetry principle were logically equivalent to the principle that a people should be able collectively to decide their own future it would be a contradiction in terms to say that 'Western states and mass media positively affected Estonians' capacity to decide their own future in the early 1990s'. And surely, no one believes that is a contradiction in terms.

We have therefore to consider, in addition to notions inherent in the symmetry principle, a concept of autonomy tentatively defined as follows: the possibilities of an actor — individual or collective — to take action in regard to itself while being free from domination by other actors.[6] The concept of freedom inherent in this definition is an important topic in itself, but for the purpose of this article — which deals primarily with the concepts of autonomy and community — it is sufficient to say, roughly speaking, that an actor is more free if able to perform many and extremely different actions rather than few and nearly identical ones.[7] In the present discussion, understanding autonomy as a collective attribute will simplify my exposition, but to prepare the ground for some arguments to be developed in the next section, one may recognize that in *moral* terms the important quality is rather the action capacity of individuals, regardless of whether they prefer acting alone or together with others. Posed as a normative principle, democracy would then be seen as requiring that the greatest amount of autonomy be yielded to the greatest number of people. In this section, however, the question is whether autonomy as a collective attribute — political autonomy — is preferable to the notion inherent in the symmetry principle. Let us start with the problem of tautology.

The tautological way in which democracy and international effects is connected by the symmetry principle, as has already been argued, would seem to contrast sharply with the usual intuitions about how this relation ought to be understood. Moreover, the principle appears to have betrayed the intention of authors who, despite their explicit commitment to it, are appreciative and capable of conducting empirical work (for example Zürn, 2000). Furthermore, if coherently applied, it would force participants in academic debate over globalization and democracy to settle their main disputes by imposing their own definitions on each other while abstaining from so much as observing the interaction of the relevant processes in the world outside those definitions. Such a situation appears to be intellectually unfruitful indeed.

Would these problems really be solved by focusing our investigations on the capacity of people to act freely rather than on people being internationally affected? It can be suspected that internationalization poses just as inescapable a problem for the concept of political autonomy introduced here as it did for the symmetry principle. Loss of jobs, pollution, immigration, supranational legislation — and other aspects of globalization or internationalization – all, it would seem, influence in a negative way the capacity of people to act freely. However, the political autonomy of states – defined as their possibilities to act on their own citizens free from domination by other actors — may in some areas even increase in the course of internationalization. Confirming this possibility with an example from my own research, political autonomy concerning levels of public expenditures seems, at least for some countries, to have *increased* during one period of internationalization.[8]

In the area of international political economy there are at least two reasons to expect this kind of impact. First, the predicament of scarcity of resources imposes limitations on almost any kind of political action, so if internationalization can bring more resources to most people this will mean less restriction on action capacity. Resources, to use a standard neo-classical argument, are in turn likely to increase when competition and division of labour grow with the integration of the markets of different countries. Second, when a state, for economic reasons, turns to actors outside its own territory it faces not only new adversaries that will attempt to dominate it on every occasion, but it also encounters new allies that may free the state from a possible ongoing domination by domestic actors such as experts, producers, labourers, and owners. And as in any power struggle, alternative alliances are an asset.

These two are surely not the only factors of internationalization relevant to political autonomy — several others suggest an opposite development — but they are sufficient to understand why a universal and general decline of political autonomy during internationalization should not be expected. Hence if we adopt the concept of political autonomy proposed here, we are relieved of the tautological connection between democracy and internationalization created by the symmetry principle.

The symmetry principle may also be compared with the concept of political autonomy in the normative terms of what is good for democracy — as well as of what is good in itself. Imagine a situation where the political autonomy of a people can be strengthened only at the cost of their being affected by some external actor from whose decision-making procedure they are excluded. What would be the best thing to do for the sake of democracy in such a situation? Before attempting an answer one should perhaps remember that the situation is not unusual. Consider the relation between Sweden and Finland during the Second World War, when the totalitarian pressures of the Soviet Union threatened Finnish democracy. To some extent Sweden supported the autonomy of Finnish democracy with state loans and the participation of volunteer corps. Was it right or wrong for Sweden to affect Finland in this way? True, the political procedure preceding the Swedish policy to affect Finland did not include Finnish citizens. Had it done so, the effect would have been much more substantial (Nykopp, 1979). But that is obviously not enough to conclude that a preference for democracy required Sweden *not* to intervene on the Finnish side. Whatever small gains in terms of Finnish political autonomy might have been the result of Swedish action, those gains undoubtedly did more good for democracy than the incontestable, concomitant violation of the symmetry principle did harm.

Furthermore, this conclusion seems not to depend on the fact that Finnish citizens wanted Sweden to affect them. Consider an opposite case, the relation between the US and Japan at the end of the Second World War. An emperor had ruled Japan for about a hundred years. However, the US, occupying Japanese territory, opted for a democratic and liberal constitution. Was that policy democratically positive or negative? The symmetry principle says negative, or possibly remains neutral, since Japanese citizens became the object of a decision which they had not themselves any part in making; and moreover, the policy of democratization would probably not have been implemented if the Japanese state or its citizens had had any say in the decision.[9] Now, comparing a parliamentary system with an autocratic empire, the democratic standing of the US policy is, however, rather easy to evaluate. One may oppose the occupation of Japan for many reasons, but democratic motives can hardly be among them. Undoubtedly, the US policy significantly fostered democracy in Japan, whatever violation of the symmetry principle it entailed.

These examples may illustrate that the concept of political autonomy is more important for the realization of democracy than is the symmetry principle, but they are less illustrative of whether the different interpretations represent something preferable or even intrinsically good. Analytically speaking it is superfluous to build such assumptions into democratic theory — whether a certain kind of rule is good or bad should be investigated rather than precluded from examination by definitional fiat (for the opposite view which — were it to be accepted — would yield further support to the conclusion below, see Lakoff, 1996: 12–14 or Saward, 1998: 8–14). But if, other things being equal, we want our definitions of democracy to conform as much as possible with ordinary language — which is not unreasonable in a discipline most of whose ideas are developed in ordinary language — there is undoubtedly a gain to be made in defining democracy in terms of a morally central quality, since that is what ordinary language tends to do. Here is then another reason for preferring the concept of political autonomy to that of the symmetry principle. While it is no intrinsically good thing to avoid contact with groups that you have not been completely integrated with in a democratic state, it could very well be regarded as intrinsically good to possess action possibilities (Sen, [1980]1998: 483) disposed at the collective or individual level.

Let us then move on to the implications of this concept of autonomy for the concept of community.

An Alternative Concept of Democratic Community

The main task of the symmetry principle in democratic theory is to determine who should be included in a democratic decision-making process. The symmetry principle is, however, not the only theoretical notion available for determining this matter. Just as the symmetry principle makes political inclusion dependent on a concept of being affected, political inclusion can be made dependent on a concept of autonomy as defined and defended earlier. The argument would then begin from the principle that democracy requires the distribution of the greatest amount of autonomy among the greatest number of people. Accordingly, decisions on who should be included in what political procedures should be taken so as to maximize this criterion, obviously accounting for the autonomy of both those included in, and those excluded from, any given procedure. To facilitate comparisons with this construct we may repeat the requirement of the symmetry principle, namely that everyone affected by a decision should be able to participate in making it.[10]

The principle of autonomy stated above, and the derived one of democratic community or inclusiveness, assume that individuals are morally prior to collectives, but they can recognize also that a crucial element in individual agency consists in acting together with others, not least because many aims are not attainable by persons acting alone. Hence these principles are suited to avoid both of the two extreme positions — whether to count as positive for democracy only those action possibilities available to individuals, or only those available to collectives. The important thing is how many and how diverse actions can be performed, and possibly the extent to which people value various actions, but not whether the agent is an individual or a collective. However, a refusal in theory to put primary importance on either individually or collectively performed actions does not solve the problem that individual and collective agency often compete in practice. If a collective is granted a certain right, for example to decide what goods can be exported to people outside it, a corresponding competence disappears at the level of individuals. What solution does the above principle suggest for a situation when people disagree over the distribution of such power among individuals and collectives?

The principle's notion of the greatest number would seem to suggest that such conflicts should be resolved through democratic procedures, for instance, the free formation of public opinion and equal treatment of voters at the point of decision-making. Such procedures would seem to permit the largest possible number of people to choose what collective actions will be implemented, or whether collectives or individuals should make the decisions in the first place. Adherence to political equality will often imply the use of majority rule (May, [1952]1982; Dahl, 1956; McGann, 2004), but under some circumstances the scope of majority rule may also be limited (Saward, 1998; Bellamy and Castiglione, 2000). It may need to be emphasized therefore that majority rule, though a form of collective action, permits as many individuals as possible to realize their preferences as much as possible even when actions are not performed by the individuals themselves.

While democratic procedures could be used to mediate between individualist and collectivist interpretations of this principle, there are other balances that need a more substantial theoretical judgement. One of them is between the amount of autonomy and the breadth of distribution. Would the principle prefer having for example 100 units of autonomy distributed between 10 persons rather than 80 units of autonomy distributed between 20? Space does not permit anything like a thorough consideration of this issue, but in brief it can be suggested that since there are two criteria which should be met — amount of autonomy and number of people — the principle would not seem to justify politics in which there is nothing, or very little, of either criterion. What would be required for the fulfilment of such a principle is, instead, that each criterion be observed as closely as possible; and if they compete with each other, then neither of them be permitted to triumph over the other. This line of reasoning may be retained together with the notion of solving some, though not all, possible trade-offs within the democratic procedure (see Agné, 2004: 294–6, for a development).

Much of the content of the principle of political community remains to be unpacked, but we may proceed now to our main task which is to compare it with the symmetry principle. In contrast to the symmetry principle, the principle of political community proposed here shares with the concept of autonomy, from which it was derived, the quality of touching upon something morally important, namely action capacity. It also shares with the concept of autonomy the quality of leaving to empirical investigations, rather than definitional exercises, the task of finding the optimal organization of, for example, cultural, economic and political activities within groups of people of different size. In contrast to the symmetry principle, it would be perfectly compatible with an empirical finding that the highest level of autonomy is achieved by organizing, say, trade activities among a more inclusive group of people than, say, the activities of making laws through elected representatives. These two points were both developed in the preceding section.

A third point that has not yet been touched upon, however, concerns the ability of the two principles effectively to serve their common purpose, namely to decide which individuals or groups should be included in which political processes. Note that here we are facing a problem of choice. We cannot be satisfied with any principle whose capacity is limited to defining right action but incapable of discriminating between actions both (or neither) of which fulfil the criterion of rightness. In contemporary politics inclusion in one political community is often, for practical or normative reasons, at the expense of inclusion in another, and this necessitates choices. That said, the demands put on a useful moral principle must also not be too high in terms of guidance capacity. Moral questions are complex and often imbued with anxiety, and we should be suspicious of any standpoint from which they appear simple (for the even stronger position that no rules must ever be trusted, but rather human judgement, in the making of moral choices, see Brown, 2003: 45). One may also be reminded of the great difficulties facing any student trying to derive practical recommendations from traditional utilitarian or Kantian ethics. Nevertheless, some indication of what is right conduct must be given by all moral arguments, and indeed in this context their capacity to guide choices must not be wholly absent (for a much stronger view, namely that the symmetry principle, were it to be tenable, must be able to furnish specific advice in a number of concrete cases, see Näsström, 2004: 41).

The trouble with the symmetry principle in this regard appears to be severe, namely that it is incapable — in the strongest possible sense of that term — of handling what may be regarded as a variant of 'the problem of double effects' (Woodward, 2001), namely that some actions have both justifiable and condemnable effects. And if it is adjusted so as to cope with this problem, it seems to yield a range of even more severe problems, most importantly that of being incompatible with the idea of political equality. If I may, let me try to explain this by considering once again the example of the South African apartheid regime.

A majority of South African citizens lived under laws that they had not participated in making — a clear violation of the symmetry principle. Imagine now that this violation of the symmetry principle could be rectified, but that a necessary condition for this to happen was that the international community had to put the South African state under severe pressure. What course of action would the symmetry principle recommend in this situation? It could not recommend that the international community put the apartheid regime under pressure, since that would legitimate the taking of action vis-a-vis the citizens of South Africa, who had had no say in deciding on that action. Nor could it advise the international community to allow the apartheid regime to go on as usual, since the South African state of that time forbade large numbers of its citizens from participating in the making of decisions that affected them. Thus there are cases in which the symmetry principle is unable to yield any recommendation at all. In a situation where both the taking of and abstaining from an action have *double* — condemnable and justifiable — effects, the principle has no means of preferring either alternative to the other.

Supporters of the symmetry principle may think this defect can be remedied if only we leave the either-or version of the principle and substitute one of degree. Instead of thinking dichotomously, they suggest, we should see the dimensions of the principle on a continuum. Making such a move opens the way to a number of alternative interpretations of the symmetry principle. Only what appears to be the strongest of these will be dealt with here. This alternative says — everyone affected by a decision should have the right to participate in making that decision, and if all cannot be included, then those who are *most* affected should have priority of inclusion.

Perhaps this more sophisticated version of the symmetry principle could overcome its difficulties in furnishing specific advice in the South African case. It would do so if empirical methods could establish that the collective decisions of the apartheid regime affected the politically excluded South African citizens *more* than the international community affected all of the South African citizens, politically included and excluded alike. However, though the application of this reasoning to the South African case may have yielded a sound recommendation, its application in other contexts would appear not to favour democracy as much as its opposite — at least if democracy is identified with political equality and accountability.

In a kind of 'democracy' grounded on the adjusted version of the symmetry principle there would be no adequate protection against people requiring privileged access to political procedures and power, because for example they have high incomes and are therefore more affected by changes in taxation, or because they have low incomes and are therefore more affected by changes in publicly financed welfare undertakings. In some cases demand for political privileges on these grounds could perhaps be refuted with reference to the difficulties in establishing the fact that one group of persons is more affected than another by a certain decision, or that it is indeed possible to include everyone affected in the procedures in question. But it would be naive to think that the principle of equal voting power can for ever stand up against every possible challenge posed to it by people eager to strengthen their personal political influence if the basic principle of democracy actually *encourages* such challenges.[11] Furthermore, such political elites as are necessary in any large-scale democracy would be given a rather peculiar status under the interpretation examined here. The privileged inclusion of these groups into political procedures would then be justified, not by the autonomy which the existence of such groups contributes to the people as a whole and the institutionalized procedures guaranteeing that it is the people rather than some other group who controls this autonomy, but by the presumably greater extent to which the members of these groups are affected by various kinds of decision. Under such circumstances a self-interested elite group would then concentrate on reproducing the effects — however reckoned — that justified the existence and power of this group in the first place. Hence if we adopt the revised version of the symmetry principle, it would seem that even the notion of representatives as accountable to the people is redundant in 'democratic' theory.

What has appeared now is sufficient at least for examining whether the principle of democratic community proposed in this article has any difficulties of similar magnitude. As far as I have been able to discern, it is preferable to the symmetry principle in regard to both coherence with political equality and accountability and the capacity of guiding action in cases of double effect. First, political equality will generally serve as a means to realize the alternative principle proposed here, namely that people be included in politics to the extent that their inclusion yields the greatest amount of autonomy to the greatest number of people, accounting for included as well as excluded persons. As already noted, to satisfy political equality one should often, though perhaps not always, take decisions by majority rule, and since a simple majority is always the largest of a number of competing groups, it will (until a majority is achieved) require a maximization of the number of people who can choose and decide policies — as stipulated also in the principle of democratic community proposed here. Hence the two ideas are indeed compatible. Moreover, the principle of democratic community would not appear to give rise to any peculiar interpretation of such elite groups as have greater access to political procedures than ordinary citizens. Instead of justifying their existence with reference to how the members of these groups are affected (to a large extent by their own decisions), their justification would depend on the effect on the autonomy, resulting from the formation for these groups, for as many as possible, included and excluded alike.

Second, the principle proposed is able to guide action even in cases of double effects. Without giving rise to inconsistencies within democratic theory, it allows us to develop quantitative arguments such as, since the autonomy of *most* South African citizens benefited to a *high* degree from a temporal inclusion of foreigners in South African politics, such inclusion was democratically preferable to abstaining from action, even if a *less* numerous group of South African citizens lost autonomy to a *low* degree because of that same inclusion.[12] Hence the principle relied upon in this argument is open to interpretation and possibly guidance in cases of double effects, while the symmetry principle, in its dichotomous variant, was found logically incapable in that regard.

If we are to choose between the symmetry principle and the one proposed here it would now appear justified to omit the former from further consideration. In passing, one may notice also the etymological legitimacy in conceiving of action capacity as delimiting and constituting a community. In one of the oldest and most widespread testimonies that we have on this matter, when the ancient Israelites declared their willingness to be the people of God, they said according to the Bible, 'All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient' (Exodus 24:7, KJV). The order of the words should be noted. The element of action capacity comes first — the doing — and only in the second place comes the element of conscious commitment — the obedience. The capacity to act (at the time in accordance with the will of God but in a democratic context arguably without being determined by others) is the *prime* justification for a group of individuals who want to conceive of themselves as a community (see Weiler, 1999: 5, for a similar interpretation).

Democracy beyond the Symmetry Principle

It was noted above that political equality can be seen as a means to fulfil the principle of inclusion defended here — to count all voices equally makes for a political system that permits the largest out of any number of groups to choose what collective action will be implemented. To some this argument may, however, stretch the concept of inclusion too far. The term 'inclusion' is sometimes used to denote the activity of entering into a citizenry, while the definition and justification of decision rules are pursued in other terms (for example Dahl, [1979]1998: 115, but see Young, 2000: 5–6, for a wider use of the term). For those who prefer a more narrow concept of inclusion, such as Dahl's, the discussion in previous sections could be rephrased by defining democracy as a political system in which as many as possible are able to decide as much as possible, and then derive from this definition of democracy two separate principles, one of inclusion, restricted to the matter of delimiting the citizenry, and one of participation, concerned with everyday political procedures.

The notion that as many as possible should decide has the advantage in democratic theory of avoiding such conclusions as are excessively oriented towards either majority or consensus rule. It implies that democrats should continue their efforts of enlarging support for political alternatives even beyond the majoritarian threshold of 51%, though a simple majority — being more numerous than any other group — remains fully entitled to make decisions. Importantly, this argument reconciles a discourse theoretical conviction that a simple majority is not enough for legitimate decision-making (for example Habermas, 1996, or Føllesdahl, 2000) with a traditional view that minorities should not be permitted to protect the status quo against changes favoured by a majority (for example Dahl, 1956, or McGann, 2004).

A distinct principle of democratic participation may also help explain the conditions under which someone must, or must not, be excluded from political procedures. It seems obvious that, even if the autonomy of most people would benefit therefrom, to expel people from their country, or to render them stateless, would not be compatible with the requirement that as many as possible should be able to participate as much as possible in the exertion of political autonomy. Political participation for the exertion of autonomy does surely not benefit from the fear created by such measures. On the other hand, regulated and predictable possibilities to exclude elected officials from the political institutions and procedures to which they have privileged access indeed appear to be a necessary condition for the autonomy, and the incentives to participate, of the greatest number of people.

Moral reasoning involves more than democracy, and democratic reasoning involves more than community, autonomy, political equality and majority rule. Still, a normative aim of any argument should yield expectations of some practical usefulness. For this reason the ideas developed above will finally be applied to three politically salient issues — people crossing national boundaries; states entering or leaving international organizations; and single markets composed by different nations. My purpose is not to deliver any definite judgements as to what should be done with regard to these issues, but rather to show that the argument tested here is not empty of concrete political implications. While my claim to relevance of the following suggestions is strong, the one to validity is not.

The democratic justification of various migration policies should ideally draw on their different effects on autonomy. If that seems too complicated an empirical operation, which it probably is at least in individual cases, a second-best strategy would be to let individuals decide for themselves in what state they are to be included. Since people are likely to prefer living under conditions of strong rather than weak democratic autonomy, other things being equal, individual choices can be expected to yield the democratically desired result more often than not. From this perspective a liberal migration policy could hence be given weight as constitutive for democracy. This does not mean that, for the sake of democracy, national boundaries must immediately be torn down. The recommendation would be rather to continually liberalize migration policies until such time as it can be shown that the displacement of people has begun to diminish autonomy, including political autonomy, for the greatest number of people. Just as democracies have made it an important mark of their nature to permit individuals to exit both territory and demos, one may argue that they should also affirm their right to enter the same.[13]

A state considering the option of entering an international organization will face the dilemma of increasing the level of political autonomy at the expense of individual shares in its exercise. The likelihood that single individuals will influence how a given amount of political autonomy is used declines as the collective grows. The larger the group to which common regulations apply, the greater the risk of such ideological heterogeneity as makes everyone less satisfied than if public policy had been decided within smaller and ideologically more homogeneous groups. On the other hand, the range of possible political action is expected to grow with the size of the polity. This is possibly true not only in the area of economic policy, where increasing size allows for increased specialization and efficiency, but also in areas as diverse as culture, which may benefit from the greater mass and exchange of ideas in an enlarged polity, and public administration, where common systems of information and education can save resources. While there is no easy way out of any dilemma, two rather abstract recommendations could nonetheless be hypothesized. First, politics should be organized in the smallest possible communities that permit political autonomy and other democratic qualities to prevail.[14] Second, *if* a polity integrates with another in order to expand the range of possible action, it is political bodies controlled by as many as possible that should decide the exercise of the political autonomy gained through integration.[15]

The inclusion of people in trade across territorial boundaries should, as in the previous two examples, be judged in terms of the autonomy it produces. While the effects could in principle be researched in any kind of autonomy, realized or not in contemporary politics, one may begin the necessary empirical investigations at those points where effects are expected to show. This would lead us to well-known hypotheses about the tendency of global markets to promote regulatory competition and to reduce welfare programmes, especially redistributive ones (see Scharpf, 1999: 85–120, for a survey of different predicted effects). While, to me, the negative effect of globalization and European integration on welfare state autonomy has often been exaggerated (see Agné, 2004, Ch. 3), I share with Scharpf and others the more fundamental conviction that these questions should be approached through systematic empirical investigations. It is hardly a coincidence that Scharpf adheres to a group of scholars who appear to find no use for the symmetry principle.

Conclusion

This article has examined and questioned a principle in democratic theory which has become particularly fashionable in analyses of globalization and European integration, namely that everyone affected by a decision should be able to participate in making it. This principle, I have found, is too strong to fit with widespread intuitions about the meaning of democracy, it leads to tautological arguments regarding how democracy and internationalization are connected, it touches upon a quality of limited or no moral importance, it is politically indeterminate in cases of 'double effects' and, when this indeterminacy is remedied, it fails to support ideas of political equality and accountability. Removing the principle from the concept of democracy is theoretically negative but politically positive — for doing so we are no longer forced to understand internationalization, globalization, and related processes as *necessarily* problematic for democracy. Until further investigation shows otherwise, at least some fears of a negative effect of internationalization on democracy at the level of states can be put aside.

Parallel with pursuing these critical arguments, new principles of democratic autonomy and community have been developed. The kind of autonomy inherent in democracy, it was suggested, may be defined as the possibilities of an actor to take action with respect to itself while being free from domination by other actors. While in many discussions it is of practical convenience to concentrate on autonomy as a collective attribute, the relevant subject in moral terms consists in persons who may prefer any mix of individually or collectively performed actions. In the light of such a concept of autonomy, a sound principle of democratic community would seem to require that people be included in political procedures to the extent that their inclusion yields the greatest amount of autonomy to the greatest number of people, while accounting for both those who are included and those who are excluded, and accounting for actions performed both individually and collectively.

This theoretical construction avoids the weaknesses revealed in the symmetry principle. It fits well with intuitions about the meaning of democracy as grasped through standard interpretations of concrete political actions; it establishes the relation between democracy and globalization as a subject for empirical research; it focuses on a morally central quality, namely action capacity; it is in principle capable of guiding action in cases of double effects; and it supports other concepts in democratic theory such as political equality and accountability.

These observations appear to give a sufficient reason for removing the symmetry principle from democratic theory. Whether it should in the next step be replaced by the alternative principle suggested in this article is a bolder claim which, I believe, has not been equally well supported. But at least the symmetry principle can no longer be adhered to on the grounds that there is no better alternative.

Notes

1. Developing and clarifying the arguments in this article I have benefited from criticisms and suggestions from Daniela Floman, Mikael Eriksson, Kjell Goldmann, Linus Hagström, Jörgen Hermansson, Johannes Lindvall, Daniel Naurin, Johan Lantto, Paul Leopold, Jouni Reinikainen, two anonymous referees of this journal, and the participants in the political theory workshop of the Swedish Political Science Meeting in Gothenburg 2001. It has been written under the auspices of the Special Program within the Swedish Institute of International Affairs and the Network for European Studies at the Stockholm University Department of Political Science. I am happy to acknowledge my gratitude to these persons and institutions.
2. It could be questioned whether this idea should even be temporarily referred to as democratic political autonomy. Later on in this article that label will be reserved for a very different concept.
3. Very late in the process of preparing this article for publication I have recognized that David Held has changed his position on inclusion. As a proxy he still uses the most general formulation of the symmetry principle, that everyone affected by a decision should be able to participate in making it, but he also elaborates a more restrictive variant — 'those whose life expectancy and life chances are significantly affected by social forces and processes ought to have a stake in the determination of the conditions and regulation of these, either directly or indirectly through political representatives' (Held, 2004: 374). While I believe these qualifications have significantly improved his position, it still does not appear capable of handling the major problems of the symmetry principle identified in this article, in particular not those dealt with on pages 438–441 and 446–498 below.
4. For the sake of simplicity *internationalization* will be used as a generic term to cover different processes such as globalization, transnationalization, regionalization, de-nationalization, and European integration, all of which increase or intensify the extent to which something — anything — is shared or affected across territorial boundaries.
5. One may recognize that when democracy has been imposed with military force from the outside, as in Japan or West Germany, the acts of imposition have indeed not been limited to an initial kick-start of democracy. The constitutions and certain policy areas of these countries were for many years, and to some extent still are, controlled by US forces. Hence even if the symmetry principle were erroneously allowed not to be refuted by its counter-intuitive recommendations with regard to the origin or constitution of democracy at the level of states, the same problematic examples would return when considering cases such as Japan and West Germany in the decades after their democratization in the wake of the Second World War.

6. For similar, though distinct, notions of democratically relevant action capacity, see Held (1995: 100), Scharpf (1997: 28) or Goldmann (2001: 156). For a comparison, and arguments for my deviations from these notions, see Agné (2004, Ch. 3, Sect. 3.1.2).
7. In a democratic theory context it is preferable not to define freedom as fulfilment of preferences or desires. If requiring that, to count as positive for democracy, action possibilities must be desired by some actor, democratic theory would, under circumstances of severe constraints on action, favour imperfectionist ideologies that hold a more limited set of preferences (liberalism rather than socialism) since there are fewer possible instances where such ideologies cannot have their preferences fulfilled, while, under circumstances of very little constraints on action, democratic theory would for a corresponding reason favour perfectionist ideologies that hold a more comprehensive set of preferences (socialism rather than liberalism). Such implications would appear difficult to reconcile with the notion of democracy as neutral among different ideological standpoints (for example May, [1952]1982; Bellamy and Castiglione, 2000). For the view that freedom should be defined in terms of capacity to realize desires, see Sen (2002: 13).
8. The operationalization of political autonomy relied upon for arriving at this result was the extent to which policy shifts converge with, or diverge from, policy preferences as expressed in election manifestos prior to the policy shift. The sample of data was confined to Britain, France and Sweden in the post-1945 period. A rise in political autonomy concerning levels of public spending, though not in redistribution of income, can be confirmed in Britain and Sweden but not in France (see Agné, 2004, Ch. 3).
9. This can be read from the Japanese nickname of the 1946 constitution '*oshitsuke kenpo*' — 'the imposed or enforced constitution'. I am indebted to Japanese-speaking political scientist Linus Hagström for this note.
10. To consider yet another theory, one may recall that Robert Dahl thinks that democracy requires the demos to include every adult person who permanently lives under the binding rules of an organization, a principle that is reminiscent of but not identical to the symmetry principle (Dahl, [1979]1998: 109, 123); he also rejects the symmetry principle outright as a universal criterion for defining the demos — '[i]t seems obvious that the Principle of Affected interests must be curbed by the criteria of Competence and Economy' (Dahl, 1970: 66). However, Dahl's alternative is hardly suitable for anyone interested in democracy under international conditions. Not only is the concept he relies on — binding rules — all but inapplicable in the domain of transnational and transgovernmental interaction, but more fundamentally his criterion is silent exactly on the point where we look to it for advice in an international context, namely whether an individual or a collective should be included in a state or international organization *the rules of which do not presently bind the individual or the collective.* While Dahl's criterion is useful once binding rules are operative, the most pressing question today is often whether a state or an individual should

be included in an organization the rules of which do not yet bind the individual or the state.

11. It is no part of my present argument that democracy excludes all instances of giving different political weight to different individuals. If a stable majority pursues its own interest against a stable minority with opposite interests, an expected political alienation of minority citizens may be overcome by strengthening their individual voices at the expense of majority citizens (Bellamy and Castiglione, 2000). My argument is limited to the following suggestion: the fact that some people are more affected than others by a political decision does not provide a sufficient reason for abandoning the principle of equal voting power in making that decision — and by making this suggestion I have no intention of answering the distinct question of whether the emergence of political marginalization may provide such a reason. Neither is it part of my argument that preferences of citizens must reflect only their own conditions and experiences when deciding how to use their equal voting power. It is often right for a majority to disregard its own interests in favour of those of a minority, though a majority must not generally be forced to do so by means of political procedures.
12. The fact that intervention can be judged as democratically preferable does not of course imply that the decision was democratically perfect. The making of foreign and international politics has many weaknesses in terms of democracy, though its capacity to strengthen democracy abroad is not generally among them.
13. One may recall that the First French Republic proclaimed a universal right for all individuals who shared the values of the revolution to become French citizens. See Schwarzmantel (2003: 96–7) for a discussion of the lack of stability of this doctrine.
14. In the context of the European Union one may think of the subsidiarity principle as an institutional illustration of this idea.
15. Still in the context of the European Union one may think of its so-called democratic deficit as an example of this requirement not being met.

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