

*Representative Democracy and Democratic
Citizens: Philosophical and Empirical
Understandings*

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THE TANNER LECTURES ON HUMAN VALUES

Delivered at

Brasenose College, Oxford
May 10 and 11, 1999

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The subject of human values is broad and daunting. When I began to consider what I might say on this topic for the Tanner Lectures, I looked at earlier lectures in this series. The lecturers were usually political philosophers or legal scholars. They analyze systems of values and beliefs and argue for one system over another. They draw on the works of other thinkers, on the writings of other philosophers, and on the opinions of judges for justification of the system they prefer.

Lurking in the background of many of these accounts, especially those that deal with my area of concern, democratic governance, is another set of values and beliefs: those held by the public. Reference is made to a “public philosophy,” to “common understandings in a community,” to a “public culture,” to the common will, or to—the term used most often though with very varied meanings—public opinion. Michael Sandel, in his book *Democracy’s Discontent*, writes of the “public philosophy,” by which he means “the political theory implicit in our practice, the assumptions about citizenship and freedom that inform our public life. . . .”¹ Michael Walzer in *Spheres of Justice* writes of something similar: “sensibilities and intuitions” shared by those in a political system.² For theorists of democracy, like Sandel and Walzer, who ground their democratic philosophy in an interpretation of morality as practiced in particular places by particular people, the values and beliefs of the public would seem to be especially relevant. Walzer, for instance, rejects a morality based on “what rational individuals . . . under universalizing conditions” would choose, in favor of that which would be chosen by “ordinary people, with a

¹ Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 4.

² Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 28.

firm sense of their own identity, with their own goods in their hands, caught up in their everyday troubles. . . .”³ Walzer certainly seems to invoke a real public with a real set of opinions.

What about those philosophers who seek to develop general, perhaps universal, principles of political morality on the basis of logic and thought experiments, rather than information about the real world of citizens? John Rawls, in *The Theory of Justice*,⁴ starts in an imagined world of rational people in a contrived state of ignorance as to who they are. Even here, one has the sense that one will have sometime to face the issue of what people will actually do and actually think. Rawls assumes a citizenry capable of reason, of cooperation, and of conceptions of the good; reasoning, cooperative, and moral citizens. These attributes are discussed at a most abstract level, but they are attributes that are (or at least could be) real. Rawls moves closer to the public in *Political Liberalism*, where he asks how one can have a stable society when there exist multiple conceptions of morality that are not compatible with each other. In this book, the public is a more palpable entity. He states in the opening of the book, “We start then, by looking at the public culture itself as the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles.”⁵

A public philosophy is, thus, not a philosopher’s philosophy. It seems to be something out there; something that needs to be discovered and taken into account. But it is hard to define and hard to find. “A public philosophy is an elusive thing, for it is constantly before our eyes. It forms the often unreflective background to our political discourse and disputes.”⁶ In saying this, Sandel echoes comments by James Bryce a century ago about public opinion in America. Bryce noted that nowhere is public opinion more

³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴ John Rawls, *The Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁵ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁶ Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, p. 4.

important than in America. He also noted that it was “difficult to ascertain.”⁷

This is one reason for the ambivalence about public opinion one finds in scholars, political actors, and the public itself. Public opinion is important; at the most fundamental level democracy rests on it. If democracy means anything, it means that in some way public values and preferences ought to have an impact on government policies; more strongly, perhaps, ought to determine what governments do. But public values and preferences are, as Bryce says, difficult to ascertain. How can public opinion guide policy when it is not clear what it is? And, even if we could ascertain it, should it be a guide? Is it not too incompetent, ill-informed, changeable, and irresponsible? You cannot follow it and, if you could, you shouldn't. Yet it is sovereign.

Empirical social scientists also address the issue of public beliefs and values and their relation to political life. There are numerous empirical studies of citizen values on social and political matters, of the ways citizens express those values. Many focus on the specific policy preferences of citizens, but there are also studies of the broader and more fundamental values they hold. These studies do not propose or justify one value system over another, but seek to describe and explain systems of values. Normative philosophers and empirical social scientists are, in some sense, in different businesses. Normative philosophers are concerned with the structure of complex normative systems, and with the justification of such systems. They pitch their arguments against alternative value systems, claiming that the alternatives are wrongly derived, or internally inconsistent, or unfortunate in their consequences—or all of these. Systematic empirical researchers usually have a different agenda. They are concerned with method and inference. They care about such matters as how one measures values or behavior in a population. They also are concerned with causal

⁷ Quoted in James A. Stimson, *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 8.

explanation: What causes the values that people hold? What are the consequences of those values? They pitch their arguments against alternative methods or alternative descriptions or alternative explanations.

I hasten to add that we ought not to take the distinction too far. Few normative philosophers ignore facts, and some pay a lot of attention. Few empirical researchers deny the normative foundations or implications of their work. Facts and values are not as sealed off from one another as some once tried to make them. But normative philosophers and empirical social scientists seem animated by different concerns and largely go about their businesses differently.

But for both, the issue of the public philosophy or public opinion is a problem. How then does one ascertain what the public thinks and how the public thinks? Does it even make sense to ask about such matters? Normative philosophers find public opinion elusive. No systematic social scientist who has worked on the subject would disagree.

There are several reasons for this elusiveness. Citizen values are not immediately apparent. Philosophers tell us about their normative systems. That is their business. Citizens have no such obligation. They do not spend time ruminating about their normative systems, nor do they write treatises explicating and justifying them. If one is interested in such values, one has to go out and find them.

There is a further problem in the empirical study of citizen values and preferences: the fact that they must be studied on two levels, that of the individual and that of the aggregate. The consequence of citizen values for political outcomes depends not on individual values and preferences but on the aggregate of values and preferences manifested in various ways—as votes, as public opinion, as communications to political elites, and so on. This second level of values—the values of aggregates—adds additional difficulty to the observation of citizen attitudes. Measuring the values

of an individual is hard enough. Aggregating them, especially if they vary across individuals in both content and intensity, is harder still.

How then can we know about this elusive phenomenon? The answer takes us into questions of methodology, not the best subject for a public lecture on a big and important substantive issue. But at least something needs to be said about it, for public opinion is not right in front of our eyes—or, to put it bluntly, if you think it is, as many do, you are wrong. It needs to be found, and what is found depends on the method used. I do not intend to discuss methods in detail, but need to digress for some general comments. It is, in fact, not that much of a digression from my substantive theme of how ordinary citizens think about political matters since what I say about method is relevant to how citizens learn about and reason about such matters.

A CONSIDERATION OF METHOD

Let us distinguish broadly between two kinds of methods: systematic social scientific methods and everyday commonsense methods. Systematic social science is, or at least should be, interested in general knowledge about social and political reality; that is, in descriptive and causal inference about the real world. I say descriptive inference, not description, to distinguish that which we observe from the more general inferences we make on the basis of those observations. We observe some people doing things, saying things, reacting in certain ways. What we observe depends on how we observe it (are they saying things spontaneously that we overhear, are they answering our questions?). And it depends on whom we observe (how were the people we observe selected?). Thus, systematic social science depends on good measures that get at the reality in which we are interested and on a selection procedure that allows us to assume that the people we observe represent the larger

population to whom we wish to generalize. If the selection is biased—gets us unrepresentative people because of the way we select them—we cannot generalize. The model for this is the ubiquitous social science tool used for studying the public, the sample survey.

Beyond descriptive inference, systematic social science aims at causal inference: how things go together, what causes what. We want to know not only what people say and do, but why they say and do it. Why they vote as they do; why they prefer one policy over another. And we want to know the consequences of what they say and do. Does it matter how they vote? The model for answering such questions is the experiment. A perfect experiment can answer the why question, because it can take into account alternative explanatory factors and isolate the ones that provide us with an explanation. The ubiquitous surveys are analyzed as if they are experiments. They are not; they don't even come close. But good analysis can get us somewhat closer to causal explanation.

Commonsense understanding of the public is less formal and self-conscious about measurement or sampling. It relies more on the vivid anecdote than on the systematic sample; on information at hand, not on information carefully selected; it often relies on introspection (“I am a member of this community so I know how we feel”); it may use indirect evidence about the public (what others say about it without asking how they know); it is intuitive.

Many—by no means all—philosophical works on democracy that deal with the public or a public philosophy or ethos take this approach. They are not too systematic in their sources. In many cases, a public ethos may be mentioned or invoked, the evidence for it being the intuitive understanding of the author. Philosophers who ground their work in actual practice—a Walzer or Sandel—often provide a rich but casually selected array of evidence about those practices. Writings about the public are invoked: the writings of literary observers, social critics, earlier

philosophers, journalists, and others who put their thoughts on paper. Anecdotes and interesting examples as to beliefs and behaviors abound. Reference is often made to court cases in which judges base decisions on general values or community standards. But if one looks to where the judges get their information about the public, it usually comes from their own understanding of what those standards are. A writer like Rawls, who begins from a more abstract logical analysis, also finds little in social science data. He invokes a vague common understanding of “the most reasonable conception of the person that the general facts about human nature and society seem to allow.” As for a social science contribution: “. . . beyond the lessons of historical experience and . . . bits of wisdom,” he tells us, “there is not much to go on” (*Political Liberalism*, p. 87).

THE PROBLEM WITH UNSYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION

The main fault of such unsystematic observation is that it is subject to the main impediment to valid descriptive inference about the public: selection bias. In the absence of systematic observation, it is easy for philosophers or politicians or other observers of society to find that which is most congenial to their position. This is easily the case if one looks inside oneself for these values. It is also easily the case if one extrapolates from those one knows best—either personally or from their writings. And it is also easy if one interprets the values of a culture; since cultures may have many values, one can always find those that suit one’s preconceptions. As Brian Barry puts it: “. . . claims to derive conclusions from the allegedly shared values of one’s society are always tendentious. If they were not, it would have to be regarded as a remarkable coincidence that the shared values a political philosopher says he has detected always happen to lead to conclusions that he already

supports.”⁸ Barry says the task of understanding the public is a futile one; that there is nothing there to understand. I think this goes too far. There is something there, but it is not easy to get at.

SURVEY RESEARCH AND THE PUBLIC

The main technique for getting at public opinion is the sample survey. Public opinion polls are ubiquitous in politics and in the press, as well as in the social sciences. Why are they used so much by social scientists? One answer might be Abraham Kaplan’s law of the hammer: give a little boy a hammer, and suddenly everything around needs pounding. Give a social scientist the social survey, and suddenly every topic needs a survey. But there are better reasons. The main value of a good survey is that it is representative of an entire population. A good random sample eliminates selection bias and allows us to generalize from the units observed to the larger universe from which the units were chosen.

But about what does it let us generalize? Usually about rather superficial measures. In a systematic random sample, one cannot probe the complexity of individual value patterns. An individual’s beliefs and values relevant to democracy are hard to elicit. They would be revealed only across a range of choice situations, observed over time, in varying contexts. Surveys, with their simple questions asked uniformly of a sample, run the danger of oversimplifying what is there, missing the main points, and perhaps creating rather than recording the reality we are studying. Furthermore, we care about the aggregate, not only the individual; about public philosophy or public opinion, not the values or thought processes of one person or another. The complex patterns of beliefs and values held by an individual do not add up easily to form an aggregate. You might understand individuals by writing biographies

⁸ Brian M. Barry, *Justice as Impartiality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 5.

describing what each believes and how they got there. But it is not easy, probably impossible, to sum up a multitude of such biographies to understand a large population. To add up values across individuals requires that we reduce those values to comparable and countable items and, in so doing, we lose some of the substance of that which we count.

The problem is a general one—not only for the social scientist but for actual political choice and action situations across a large population. James C. Scott has written most interestingly about the attempt by governments to control societies by making them “legible”—that is, by standardizing things (people, towns, transactions) so that they can be counted or regulated. People and objects need to be put in categories (laws of course depend on categories), observational techniques need to be standardized, accounting schemes need to be devised. All of this smooths out the edges of a reality that is much more complex and contextually varied. Scott focuses on the pathologies this can create but realizes that some such systematization is needed in any complex society.

The problem Scott identifies in relation to the action of states is a well-known problem in the social sciences. He calls his book *Seeing Like a State*.⁹ If it were a book on social science methodology, it might be called *Seeing Like a Social Scientist*. Social scientists (or at least some of us) consider the task of social science to be one of making society legible, to find order out of the chaotic business of everyday life. We, like bureaucrats, tax collectors, and planners—among other unpleasant people—like to have people neatly categorized. But, just as Scott worries about the pathologies associated with this as states use such information to impose a rigid order to society that is destructive of ordinary practices, so one might worry that systematic social science bleaches out reality in its attempt to systematize.

In democratic politics, the best example of the simplification

⁹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

of values and preferences is the vote. No one has found a substitute as yet. Millions of individuals—each unique, with a complex set of values, beliefs, and interests—can express a standardized preference simultaneously. No form of citizen control would be possible if it were not for that standardization. If all wrote long letters about what the government ought to do, they could not be translated into action. Votes capture the entire voting body and reduce it to a simple and coherent aggregate. You can vote or not vote and, if you vote, you can choose from a limited set of options. The multitudinous and varied reasons why citizens decide to vote rather than stay home and then decide for whom to vote are reduced to a couple of stylized and blunt choices.

Surveys are better than votes in terms of the information they give us about the individual. Indeed, they are used to interpret the vote—to find out why people voted as they did. But they still provide only limited insight into the public's values and beliefs.

Nevertheless, surveys are as good as it gets when one wants to typify a larger population in a valid manner. It is the technique from which I will draw my evidence about the public, flawed though the technique may be. Furthermore, good academic sample survey research—research that is not aimed at providing quick descriptions of public opinion on Kosovo or some other current issue—can go well beyond the simple report of what percent of the public favors what. Survey research can deal with variation in opinion, which is often more interesting than where the majority opinion lies. Furthermore, the answer to a single question may tell little. Such answers are sensitive to question wording. But patterns across sets of questions are more reliable and can reveal a lot about how people think. The fact that opinions change over time and vary with question wording makes many doubt the solidity and usefulness of survey results. But, properly analyzed, such change over time and variation with the stimulus presented to the respondent can give a good deal of insight into the nature of public opinion.

Furthermore, ordinary surveys can be supplemented with longer in-depth interviews or group discussions to get us closer to an understanding of citizen reasoning processes. In addition, survey researchers have, in recent years, expanded their repertoire of methods. Computer-assisted telephone interviewing allows one to explore the reasoning behind a particular answer by varying the source presented to the respondent, by varying the nature of the issue, by asking and allowing citizens to reflect on their views, by challenging views that they have previously expressed, and the like. In this manner, something approaching a dialogue with an individual is possible; more important, dialogues with samples of individuals are possible.

The studies I report will come almost entirely from the United States. The United States is a curious place with strange and sometimes frightening customs, some of which have been recently too publicly displayed. I focus on it because that is where most of the data I wish to refer to have been gathered. I am not sure of the generalizability of these data to other democracies—each of which is curious in its own way. But my reading of such works as the William Miller, Annis May Timpson, and Michael Lessnoff work on British political beliefs finds much that is consistent with what I will discuss.¹⁰ I think there are general lessons here, but we must be cautious in generalizing.

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS

Democratic Dilemmas

Having said something about the methods for ascertaining the public's values and preferences, let me turn to what can be learned

¹⁰ William L. Miller, Annis May Timpson, and Michael Lessnoff, *Political Culture in Contemporary Britain: People and Politicians, Principles and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

about the public from surveys. The substantive issue I shall consider relates to a major democratic dilemma associated with citizen participation in a democracy. It is interesting how commonly the words “democracy” and “dilemma” seem to go together. When not acting as a social scientist, I am the director of the Harvard University Library, and I sometimes look at our electronic catalogue just to see what one can learn from the catalogue records. I found over sixty records that contain the words “democracy” and “dilemma.” Apparently authors like to put the terms together. Democracy seems to pose a dilemma in relation to, among other things, religion, bureaucracy, secrecy, science, socialism, nationalism, funding of the arts, school desegregation, authority, national defense, in a number of titles Germany, and—for whatever it means—the future. This is not surprising. Democracy as a system spawns dilemmas and contradictions. The very term “democratic government” is contradictory. “Democracy” refers to the people, to control from below, to procedures for giving citizens a voice over decisions. “Government” refers to policies, to authoritative decisions, to control from above, to the means for making effective policies. This is the dilemma I wish to explore from the perspective of the role of the public in democratic governance: can one have a democracy that gives the citizenry substantial and equal voice over public affairs and at the same time produces effective and just policies?

Let me spell this out. Citizen voice and participation are at the center of the democratic half of democratic government. Through participation citizens express their preferences to governing officials and induce them to respond to those preferences. They send information about themselves (who they are, what they want, what they need) and apply pressure on officials for some response. Citizens do this in many ways: by voting, working in political campaigns, writing letters, taking part in community actions, protests, and on and on. The sum of these activities represents the way in which democratic voice is expressed.

Democracy depends on such voice. It also depends upon equal voice. One of the bedrock principles of democracy is the equal consideration of the needs and preferences of all citizens, a principle embedded in the notion of one person, one vote. Note that I do not speak of equal response or equal benefit from the government. That may be much too much to ask. Even if citizens spoke with equal voice and governing officials gave each an equal hearing, equal response would not be possible. Government resources are limited; citizen preferences conflict with each other; everyone cannot get an equal response. If they cannot get an equal response, can they get a fair one? It is hard to know exactly what a fair response would be, but let us assume it to mean, among other things, that those who get somewhat less will not consider the result unjust (at least, not wildly unjust). Without an equal voice and an equal hearing, there is no chance of getting close to an equal response and very little chance of an outcome that will be considered fair and just. From this perspective equal political voice fosters beneficial outcomes. Put another way, the outcomes will be better—fairer—if everyone gets a chance to be heard. For one thing, insofar as democratic outcomes are supposed to reflect the preferences and needs of the citizenry and insofar as equal political voice fosters the communication of those preferences and needs, procedures maximizing equal voice lead to beneficial outcomes. In addition, equal political voice should foster more supportive political views among citizens. People who have a voice are more likely to accept policies of which they disapprove than are those who do not. And political voice—the chance to participate—also fosters a more enlightened citizenry. All these things, and more, suggest that a citizenry that has a real and equal voice in policy-making is a better citizenry, and where that happens there will be a better polity.

But there is another side to the story. The desirability of citizen voice and, especially, equal voice depends on some qualities of the citizenry. Why do we want to give voice to citizen preferences and

needs? And why an equal voice? For some the answer lies in the belief that all people are equal before God. A more secular set of reasons expressed by such democratic thinkers as Robert Dahl and John Rawls is that people are reasoning beings, capable of understanding the world; and that they are moral beings, capable of conceptions of the good. What does this mean for the ordinary citizen, and why is it the principle on which equal citizen voice is grounded? For one thing, it means that citizens should be good (or at least adequate) moral reasoners. Their preferences and values, whatever their substance, should have some coherence and be somewhat stable. If preferences and values change from moment to moment, or if they are incoherent and self-contradictory, it is hard to know how they can be given meaningful expression. Also, citizens should be good (or at least adequate) social scientists. They should have enough information to know how to pursue their goals through politics. They should be capable of making causal inferences about how their activity might lead to desired outcomes (for instance, to be able to figure out, in the light of their preferred policy outcomes, whom to vote for or how one policy rather than another will affect their welfare). If they cannot reason about the political world, what do their expressed preferences mean?

Thus, democratic voice would seem to rest on some capacity of citizens to be moral reasoners and social scientific reasoners. It may rest on another quality of ordinary citizens: their willingness to transcend their own values and preferences. There are two components of this willingness. One is a willingness to look beyond their own narrow self-interest to consider the common good and the other their willingness to commit to (or at least accept) principles of fair democratic procedure that allow a multiplicity of viewpoints or doctrines to be expressed. Some would argue that the first is not necessary: let self-interest rule and an invisible hand will provide good social outcomes. This may work in the marketplace of commodities; I believe (though I cannot argue the case

fully here) that it does not apply in the making of public policy through the political process. The second is more unambiguously tied to democracy. Rawls refers to this as a free-standing overlapping consensus on a democratic process that involves tolerating alternative doctrines. This, as he notes and as many democratic theorists have noted before, is needed to maintain a stable democracy given the inevitable plurality of competing doctrines subscribed to by citizens in a democracy.

But what if citizens are not up to the task: if they are inadequate moral reasoners or social scientists—if they don't know what they want or how to get it? What if they can't be relied upon to go beyond their own preferred value system to allow others to exist? Democratic voice becomes meaningless or undesirable. Or what if citizens are *unequally* equipped for moral reasoning or social science analysis? Some are competent, others not. And what if they are unequally committed to democratic procedures? *Equal* democratic voice might be meaningless or undesirable. These considerations have led many philosophers of democratic government to express skepticism about the public, about too much democracy, about populist democracy. The voice of the people, unchecked, coming equally from those who might be expected to be more democratically competent and supportive of democratic principles and from others who are less so, might be dangerous for democracy. And systematic social science studies have supported that position. Yet without voice and without equal voice, what happens to the equal consideration of the needs and preferences of all?

This is the democratic dilemma of my lectures. Equal citizen voice is needed for equal consideration of needs and preferences. Equal citizen voice may be disruptive of effective government and dangerous to democracy. I want to look more closely at what we know about citizen voice and public opinion to see if this is the case.

In this look at citizens, I am interested less in the substance of

what citizens think—the content of their values or their policy preferences—than in how they think. I want to see how they operate as normative political philosophers; to consider, that is, the structure of their systems of political preferences and values. And I want to see how they operate as empirical social scientists; to consider, that is, how they obtain information about the political and social world, and how they deploy it to make causal inferences about how the world works.

Both views of the citizen as participant—citizen voice as a good thing and citizen voice as a bad thing—can be found in the literature and in our common understanding of politics. In the absence of closer data on what citizens do and how they reason, one might hope for the best but worry about the worst.

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENS: WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?

So let us look more closely at the data—with all due caution about the weakness of systematic data but, I hope, with respect for what it can tell us. I will proceed as follows. I want to begin with work I have been doing for a number of years on political equality, more specifically equality in political participation. This is not exactly the same thing as political voice but close to it if we think of participation as the means by which citizens exercise their political voice—by which they communicate their interests and preferences to governing elites and induce them to respond. It is empirical research based on large-scale surveys of what citizens do, work done collaboratively with Kay L. Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. I want to summarize this research briefly and then connect it, more than it has been connected, to normative issues of political equality.

Our work begins with the basic principle of equality mentioned earlier: that in a democracy citizens ought to receive equal

consideration of their needs and preferences. I'd like to summarize what we found about the extent of political equality and then return to the normative principle from which we begin to look more closely at the desirability of political equality—particularly from the perspective of the capacity of the ordinary citizen to understand and reason about political matters.

ARE CITIZENS EQUAL IN POLITICS?

To begin with, as is well known—and as our studies confirm with a mind-numbing amount of data—citizen voices are not equal. Americans are as active, or substantially more active, than citizens elsewhere. But what is distinctive about political participation in America is that participation is so unequally distributed, hewing more closely to the fault lines of social class. In the United States the skew introduced by the relationship between high levels of education or income and high levels of political activity—a bias characteristic of political participation in democracies around the world—is especially pronounced.

Why is this the case? In thinking about why some people are active while others are not, my colleagues and I have found it helpful to invert the usual question and to ask instead why people do not take part in politics. Three answers immediately suggest themselves: because they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked.

- “They can't” suggests a paucity of necessary resources—time to take part, money to contribute to campaigns and other political causes, and skills to use time and money effectively.
- “They don't want to” focuses attention on the absence of political engagement—lack of interest in politics or little concern with public issues, a belief that activity can make little

or no difference, little or no knowledge about the political process, or other priorities.

- “Nobody asked” implies isolation from the networks of recruitment through which citizens are mobilized to politics.

These three components—resources, engagement, and recruitment—explain the stratification in political activity. In general, the advantaged members of society are more politically motivated. Educated, affluent people are more likely to be politically interested and informed; to care about political matters. They also have more resources: not time (which turns out to be equally available—or perhaps equally unavailable—to all), but they obviously have more money. And they are better endowed with the necessary skills, which come from good education, a high-level job.

And a word on the last reason for inactivity, “Nobody asked.” Some political activity is spontaneous, but a lot is recruited. We become active because someone asked us to. One might imagine that recruitment might overturn the stratification derived from resources. After all, political movements often deliberately mobilize the poor, the disadvantaged—people who would otherwise be inactive. But our research shows that, overall across the population, recruitment merely reinforces the stratification of participation. Recruiters are rational. They look for those who can participate effectively—they look where the money is—and they bring into politics people who would have been active anyway.

In recent years, the stratification in political activity deriving from resource disparities has been growing, the major reason being the relative shift in the place of time and money as the most important resource for political activity. Money has become more important, time less. The reason lies in supply and demand: time has become in shorter supply as more and more families include two earners. In addition, the professionalization of political campaigns and the increased role of television have made money more valuable to politics. Campaigns want money to buy a computer

and database or television time, more than they want people who can walk the streets or stuff envelopes.

This increases the stratification of political activity for the simple and obvious reason that money is a stratified resource, time is not. The rich have money; the poor don't. All of us, rich and poor, seem to have as much—or as little—time.

From the point of view of our evaluation of political inequality, it makes a difference whether the inequality in political voice is based on a disparity in motivation or a disparity in resources. If the former is the reason—people prefer to stay home and watch television rather than turning out to vote or going to a community meeting; or they prefer a few more hours in the office rather than getting involved in a political campaign—we would be less concerned with the fact that their voice is not heard. If it is a matter of “they can't”—because of resource inadequacy—then there is a more serious problem. Our research on citizen participation shows that, though both motivation and resources play a role, the latter seem to be a much greater inhibitor of activity than the former.

Such resource disparities are, however, hard to remove. One can imagine limiting the use of money in politics. That is what campaign finance legislation in the United States attempts. It is ineffective because of the inventiveness of campaign managers. Furthermore, the U.S. Supreme Court has severely restricted the extent to which one can limit the use of money in politics, arguing that it inhibits free speech. There are many who disagree with that interpretation and who might argue that speech is freer when the ability to speak is more equal. But the Supreme Court ruling stands. In American English—I don't know about British English—there is the saying that “Money talks.” It is truly appropriate for American politics, for money talks loudly and receives constitutional protection as a form of speech.

In any case, even if there were limitations on money, it would be difficult to go beyond limiting money to limit other resources. Few of us would think it appropriate to limit the use of one's

cognitive skills (the ability to understand issues and see connections among them) or rhetorical skills (the ability to make a compelling case).

Michael Walzer has written approvingly of what he calls complex equality, where there are different standards of fairness in different spheres of life, where the spheres are somewhat insulated from each other, and where people may be at the top of the heap in one sphere and lower down in another. Our data on citizen participation do show some difference of standards in different spheres: the norms in politics are more egalitarian than in the economy. One person, one vote rules in politics; one person, one dollar or pound does not rule in economic matters. But the boundaries between the spheres are porous, as inequalities in the economy—in money and skills—spill over and create inequality in the political sphere.

Thus, when it comes to political activity, the three factors of motivation, resources, and recruitment work to reinforce each other and give a cumulative political advantage to those better off in other ways. The result of our analysis of political equality might be summarized in the following manner: citizen voice ought to be loud, clear, and equal: loud so officials pay attention, clear so they know what people want, and equal so that the normative idea of equal consideration of interests and preferences can be satisfied. Our data show that the public's voice is often loud, sometimes clear, but rarely equal.

Do We Want Political Equality?

That is our story in a nutshell. But let me come back to the opening normative principle and make it a question: should all voices be equal? Let's look at that from two perspectives: the substance of what is communicated to the government in terms of citizen policy preferences and citizen need (when citizens use their political voice, what do they communicate?) and in terms of the quality of

decisions made by the government (what contribution does citizen voice make to the justice and effectiveness of government policy?).

On the substance of what is communicated by active citizens, the crucial point is that unequal voice makes a difference. Suppose some people are active and others not, but in terms of the characteristics that are relevant to the content and implementation of public policy—the needs and the preferences people have—the active and inactive citizens are not different. Inequality in activity would not make much difference, because the subset of citizens who are active would communicate the same messages about their needs and preferences to the government as would the inactive portion of the population. Some well-known research by Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone shows that, if you compare voters and nonvoters in terms of their policy preferences on standard U.S. National Election Study questions (along the lines of should the government see that everyone has a good job and standard of living or stay out of such things), there is little difference between the two groups—suggesting that it does not matter much that some vote and others do not.¹¹

But suppose we look at other political activities than the vote: activities like working for a candidate, writing a letter to an official, or giving a large campaign contribution. There is a vast difference between those who are active and those who are not. Those less active are groups with distinctive needs and preferences in relation to government policy. They are the more disadvantaged members of society: the poor, the less well educated, racial and ethnic minorities. It is consequential that they are less active.

Thus, equal participation would enhance the likelihood of equality in public policy. This is not to say that the expression of political voice by a group necessarily results in government response; or that government response to a group requires that the group express its needs. There are many other parts to the political

¹¹ Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

process. People may speak up and get nowhere. Conversely, people who do not speak up may have their views represented by proxy participants who take up their cause, by nongovernmental organizations, or by bureaucrats or legislators pursuing autonomous policy goals. Their needs and preferences can be sought out through government or foundation research. All this is true. But, on balance, groups that put their own agenda on the table and press their own case are likely to wind up better off in the policy-making and policy-implementing arena than those who do not.

But that still leaves the democratic dilemma: the competence of ordinary citizens. We want policies that are effective, that are responsive to needs in a fair and reasonable manner, and that work to preserve the democratic process. Suppose all speak up but few are competent: will we get such policies? Suppose further that citizens are self-centered, unwilling to pursue the common good, and unwilling to tolerate those with whom they disagree. Can democracy survive? Yet, if we do not have something like equality in political activity, how do we keep government policy from being skewed to the benefit of a small, more advantaged portion of the populace?

One obvious answer is representative government. It is a system, as James Madison put it, that allows the views of the people to be enlarged and refined by passing them through the consideration of a few selected and wiser citizens. But if those selected and wiser citizens—our representatives—hear only from some of the people, they will be more likely to give consideration to those from whom they hear. Views may be refined, but in the process the views of significant groups may be refined away. Thus, citizen participation remains important and citizen competence an issue.

A close look at the beliefs, values, and way of thinking of citizens is in order to see if they can perform the tasks of citizenship. How competent are they as reasoners about public matters and as moral judges about such matters? How good are citizens as social

analysts? Do they have relevant, unbiased, and accurate information or know how to get it? Can they use that information to make valid causal inferences about the likely consequences of various actions? And do they have the moral commitments that would seem to be relevant for an effectively functioning democracy in which citizen voice is expressed? One would be a concern about public matters and the public good rather than narrow self-interest. And the other would be openness to the expression of views different from their own.

Before systematic survey data were available, there were many views as to the nature of the public. For some, the average citizen was a wise and reasonable observer of politics, and public opinion represented the sum of that wisdom. Among populist thinkers, public opinion was far wiser and more moral than the opinion of intellectual or economic or political elites. For others, the average citizen was a pretty pathetic character when it came to reasoning about public matters, and the aggregate of such opinions was even worse. For the latter observers, political matters would be better left to those more competent to deal with them—to the elites that the more populistically inclined thinkers despised.¹²

The Incompetent Citizen

Perhaps the main indictment of the public—certainly the most noticed in the social sciences—came in the important work of Philip Converse on the nature of mass belief systems.¹³ He looked for a structure to opinions and concluded that there was not much there. A well-structured belief system would be one in which people had a clear position on an abstract set of principles, and their

¹² Of the many statements of this principle, Walter Lippmann's is one of the clearest: Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922).

¹³ Philip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964). pp. 206–61.

particular policy positions would derive from the more general principles. The result would be a coherent and consistent set of political positions—perhaps conservative, perhaps liberal.

Converse found that few people referred to broad ideological positions when they discussed politics. Furthermore, there was not much “constraint” in people’s attitudes on issues. By constraint he meant whether the attitudes of individuals were connected to one another and whether specific policy positions could be deduced from the person’s more general principles. People did not have that structure. One position did not predict another. Nor did the answer to a question asked at one time predict the answer to a question asked later; change the wording a bit and you change the response. The general view was that Americans were nonideological. Their views were neither rich, nor firm, nor coherent.

In addition, there was evidence at that time that the public was not morally competent; that they held views incompatible with a cooperative, ongoing democratic system. Citizens were narrowly focused on their own private lives and self-interest. And, as the studies of Samuel Stouffer showed, they could not be relied upon to support the basic freedoms of expression that underlie democratic rule in a pluralist society.

The result was disturbing to students of democracy. It suggested that the average citizen was not up to the job. He or she was neither cognitively competent to make the calculations needed for a reasoned voice in the policy process nor morally competent to seek goals consistent with a functioning democratic community. If this is the case, it would imply that if we seek political equality in order to get equality in the expression of citizen preferences and needs, we may lose on the quality of citizenship.

Let’s see what more recent research tells us about both kinds of competence—cognitive and moral. And in doing so we can see how the reasoning of citizens resembles or differs from that of social scientists as well as normative philosophers.

The Somewhat Competent Citizen

Are citizens really as instrumentally incompetent as these early data suggested? Though much of what earlier studies said about the incompetence of citizens and the incoherence of their political positions was and remains true, there are ways in which the judgment may have been too harsh. For one thing, our research methods may overstate the absence of information among citizens or the weakness of citizen reasoning. Here is a case where survey methods and the simplification they create may do citizens a disservice by making them look more simple than they are. Surveys ask citizens about the issues that the survey researcher cares about—or thinks the public (or the people sponsoring the survey) cares about. The agenda is set by the questioner who suddenly appears at the respondent's doorstep or at the other end of the telephone line. The citizen, with no prior warning or chance to study is given a test on topics the poll-taker has chosen.

Furthermore, how competent a citizen appears in a survey may depend not only on the questions the interviewer asks, but also on the questions that the political process asks of citizens. When interviewers began to ask citizens about their voting choice and how they came to it, they found that citizens evaluated candidates on the basis of personality or party, but rarely mentioned policy positions as a reason for preferring one over the other. One reason might have been that citizens cared more about personality than policy. Another might be that there was little difference in policy between the candidates in the relatively unpolarized 1950s. When my colleagues and I followed up these studies after the more polarized election campaigns of Lyndon Johnson versus Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Richard Nixon versus George McGovern in 1972, we found that respondents spoke more about issues when they answered questions about these candidates, and that issues—the positions of the candidates and the positions of the voters—played a

bigger role in their voting decisions. In other words, by offering the voters, as Goldwater put it, a choice not an echo—that is, a candidate with a clear and well-articulated set of policy positions away from the muddled median—he was posing a question to the public that allowed for issue responses.¹⁴ (Incidentally, the elections of 1964 and 1972 show that if you offer the public a choice rather than an echo, the public will vote for the echo. But that is another story.)

Thus, it may be that these data overstate the limitations of ordinary citizens. They are not philosopher kings or even princes, but they are not as benighted as the portrait might suggest. A newer literature on citizen competence and citizen reasoning has emerged, much of it based in cognitive social psychology. It is a rich literature with many different schools that often seem, to me at least, to be saying the same thing in different words while arguing over who is right. This literature, while not rejecting the substance of the findings about the limitation of ordinary citizens, argues that they do better than one might expect. They have efficient ways of using limited information, their views are not sophisticated but they do have a structure, and, in the aggregate, they do better than their individual skills might suggest. The thrust of this literature on citizen competence is that citizens and the citizenry (individuals and the aggregate of individuals) do pretty well with what limited resources they have.

Let's begin with information. This newer literature focuses on the issue of the way in which citizens can cope in situations of limited information. Though much classic analysis in economics assumes perfect information for rational actors, much recent theorizing and much empirical work recognizes that people operate with, to use Herbert Simon's term, bounded rationality. We cannot know it all—neither the facts nor the causal relationship

¹⁴ Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

among facts. As Anthony Downs famously pointed out, information is costly. The ordinary citizen, faced with the complexity of politics, would be irrational to gather too much—in part because of the complexity of it all, more so because the individual citizen can have only a tiny voice in what the government does.

How then do citizens with little information, limited time, and limited influence on outcomes—but ultimate legitimacy—navigate the complexities of politics? Let me outline some of them. Much of the literature on citizen information has moved beyond asking what citizens know—which is painfully little—to a focus on the issue of how citizens can make meaningful, rational decisions under conditions of little information. They do so by using heuristics. These are shortcuts that allow someone to come to a reasonable conclusion with limited information. There are many types of heuristics; different authors use different categories. Anthony Downs considered ideology and party to be the heuristics most used in elections. You did not need to know more about an issue than the position on it taken by your party or by those who shared your general ideology in order to come to a decision “right” for you.

There are other similar heuristics. If there are people you trust who share your social position and your values, and if they are more attentive to some issue than you choose to be, it is a pretty reasonable approach to follow them. (We all do this in our day-to-day lives; each of us has a friend who knows about restaurants and another who can tell us what car to buy.) Or we follow some trusted government official. Members of the U.S. Congress follow the lead of specialists, if they generally share the values of the specialist. Citizens can do that as well.

Heuristics have changed the ordinary citizen from the benighted incompetent of a few decades ago to the rational user of limited information of today. However, though a shortcut may be an efficient way of getting somewhere, it is useful only if it takes

you where you want to go. The information acquired through the use of a heuristic may not be valid. It may be irrelevant to the issue at hand, wrong, or biased. Citizens who take information from others often select those near at hand or those who share their views. This is the road to biased information. There is, however, evidence from an interesting study by Robert Huckfeldt that, though individuals do use the criterion of shared views in choosing information sources, they can tell who is informed and who is not and they choose information also on that basis. They are fairly good at choosing those who are in the know. They get by with the help of their friends—and can choose friends who are informed.

This is not to convert ordinary citizens into social scientists. They do place some quality control on information sources, but they also look for that which is comfortable with what they already believe. (Social scientists sometimes do also.) Perhaps the ordinary citizen differs from the systematic social scientist most in the area where I suggest there might be some weakness in the information seeking by normative philosophers—in the area of sampling and representativeness. Systematic social science depends on representativeness (that's why we like random samples and surveys). The ordinary citizen samples information, not randomly and perhaps not in terms of typicality, but in terms of the congeniality of the information to what is already there, or the vividness of an example, or the recency of acquisition of the information—none of which criteria would satisfy the canons of proper research design. The ordinary citizen always has an Aunt Edna—a person well known to students of survey research. When someone is confronted with statistics about health habits and longevity, especially when the statistics make the person uncomfortable, we hear about Aunt Edna, who drank a quart of scotch and smoked two packs every day but lived to be ninety-five. Ordinary citizens use concrete examples—a particular news story, a particular personal event—and analogize from that. Studies suggest that sample bias

in information acquisition represents the biggest challenge to accurate inference on the part of the citizen.¹⁵ In general, ordinary citizens misunderstand social reality because of statistical errors: they do not know how to make valid inferences from evidence. For instance, the notion of independent probabilities is unclear. One of my favorite examples—indeed, a statistical heroine of mine—is the woman who won the lottery in the state of New Jersey twice (each time for over a million dollars). When interviewed by the press she said she was not going to play the lottery anymore. When asked why, she said that it would not be fair—she wanted to give someone else a chance. Citizens also have logical problems making causal connections. Their reasoning often involves such statistical problems as omitted variable bias (thinking that *A* causes *B* when something else, a variable not taken into account, may cause both of them) or getting the direction of causality wrong.

In sum, citizens are not statisticians or systematic social analysts. But they do have ways of getting by.

The Reasoning Citizen

What about citizen reasoning about political choices—whom to support in an election; what policy to support; when and on what to become politically active? Recent work on the way in which citizens reason, closely related to the work on heuristics, takes what seems to me to be a more realistic view than did earlier literature. It turns the view of the public upside down. The earlier view was that citizens had little in their heads; that was why they would easily change from one position to another. The newer account of why ordinary citizens' positions on issues change over time or change with changes in question wording is not that people have

¹⁵ Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 253.

little in their minds, but that they have too much. John Zaller has given the clearest expression of this position in relation to survey responses. The reason responses seem to have a weak, almost random character is that people have many values or principles in their heads. Zaller calls them considerations—a broad and useful term because it encompasses what we would call values or principles but also other considerations such as narrow self-interest, social pressures, and the like. When faced with a question about public policy in a survey, people do not answer at random in order to show that they have an answer (as many theories of the survey response believe). They do answer “off the top of their heads”—that is, without much reflection—but do so by sampling from the set of considerations the question evokes. They see what kind of an issue it is, they look at the considerations it relates to, they often sample from the considerations they hold in their heads, and on that basis they come to an answer.

This description of the process accords well with several facts about the choice situation in relation to some issue of public policy. One is that almost all social issues involve a tradeoff among values. Thus, an issue position can be affected by multiple considerations. Most people have many such considerations in their minds. Some of these are inconsistent with each other, but that inconsistency is not apparent since citizens do not routinely critique their values for logical coherence. Furthermore, when faced with an issue where multiple and conflicting values may apply, individuals can choose to frame the issue as involving one set of considerations rather than another. In this way, they handle the inconsistency without reconciling the various sides.

The work of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman is most prominent in this area. In a long series of experimental studies, they and others have shown that the same choice situation leads to a different decision depending on the way the choice is framed—that is, on the context in which the choice is placed. Take the same

situation, change the symbolic description, and you change the response.¹⁶ Often this is done by analogy: is intervention in Kosovo like intervening to save the Jews under Hitler or intervening in Vietnam? One of my favorite examples is an experimental prisoners' dilemma study in which the likelihood of cooperative behavior in exactly the same game was affected by whether the game was named Community or Wall Street. Call it Community and players are more likely to cooperate; call it Wall Street and they are more selfish.¹⁷

The point here is that citizens have many standards in their heads rather than one. Consider the self-regarding economic-type calculations assumed in most economic modeling of human behavior. Such a standard may be applied in many situations, but perhaps not in all. Experimental literature shows that the more the experimental situation "approximates a competitive . . . market" with anonymous buyers and sellers, the less other-regarding behavior will be observed. As Samuel Bowles puts it, ". . . market like situations induce self-regarding behavior, not by making people intrinsically selfish, but by invoking the self-regarding behaviors in their preference repertoires."¹⁸ What behavior individuals choose depends on the context in which they are choosing.

The research on framing sheds light on what it means when citizens appear to have changeable and uncertain views. Changes in position from one question to another may be the result of subtle changes in the frame that the question provides or change in the context in which it has been evoked. Or it may be due to a

¹⁶ Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," in Roben Hogarth, ed., *Question Framing and Response Consistency* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982).

¹⁷ Lee Ross and Andrew Ward, "The Power of Situational Effects in the Prisoners' Dilemma Game" (unpublished manuscript, 1993), cited in Cass Sunstein, "Social Norms and Social Roles," *Columbia Law Review* 96 (May 1996): 913n33.

¹⁸ Samuel Bowles, "Endogenous Preferences: The Cultural Consequences of Markets and Other Economic Institutions," *Journal of Economic Literature* 36 (March, 1998): 75–111; quotation on p. 89.

change in the media that have primed people for one frame rather than another. This changeability is not necessarily a manifestation of the weak views of people but may be due to a change of the context in which they see the issue.

This fact does not, however, necessarily create confidence in the thoughtfulness and reasonableness of citizen views. Tversky and Kahneman find evidence for the existence of an availability heuristic—that is, issues are framed by the set of considerations that are nearest to the top of the individual’s mind.¹⁹ This may be the most recent consideration to which they have been exposed. (As an aside, one ought to note that this is not a monopoly of rank and file citizens; each of us can certainly think of high political leaders whose views depend on whom they spoke to most recently.)

This is a major way in which media coverage affects how citizens think about issues. Newspapers and TV have their major impact by “priming” people to consider one consideration rather than another more salient in relation to an issue—by giving it a particular frame. They cue citizens to place an issue in one or another category. If change of the symbol changes the position, or if the media or elites can frame issues in one way or another and elicit response from citizens, this suggests perhaps that citizens do not act autonomously; that they are manipulated by symbol spin doctors in the media and in public office.

Certainly there is evidence for such manipulation—and a large number of people spend a good deal of time and money trying to do just that. But one can put a somewhat more optimistic interpretation on citizen sensitivity to the nature and origins of the message and to context. Individuals may change their views depending on the context within which an issue or decision arises. But this is not mere reaction to irrelevant symbols. Context mat-

¹⁹ Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability,” *Cognitive Psychology* 5 (1973): 207–32.

ters in terms of what values are applied. The games Wall Street and Community differ. One ought to trust and cooperate in a community; on Wall Street less trust and more defection seems appropriate. We would not have much respect for the person who acted like a Wall Street investor in all personal relationships. And the investor who behaved like a communitarian on Wall Street would likely soon go broke.

Furthermore, research shows that framing is not a manipulation of passive individuals by sly framers. What frame an individual accepts depends, at least in good part, on the values or considerations the individual already has stored. There is a running interaction between that which is stored from earlier experiences and the new input. There is evidence that individuals do not accept just any frame. Frames are accepted if they are compatible with previously available considerations. And individuals make judgments as to the credibility of a framer. Thus, the process of framing is not merely a matter of passive citizens and active elite manipulators. It may go too far to consider it a democratic dialogue in which citizens interact with the media and other elite communications, as well as with friends and others, to consider and reconsider their positions on public matters in the light of new arguments and changing contexts. But it may represent a quite reasonable decision process carried out by somewhat autonomous individuals. Certainly, there is evidence for autonomous position-taking on the part of the mass public. Consider the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair. The public clearly responded autonomously—that is, without cues from political or media elites. When the story first broke, all the pundits signaled that Clinton was through since the public would not approve. No one primed the public to make distinctions between private and public life. Indeed, the only fully reasonable participant in that madness seems to have been the American public.

This is consistent with several approaches to individual decision-making that stress on-line processing of political information.²⁰ Individuals develop overall evaluations of people or issues or groups. New information modifies that stored impression—creating an updated, running tally of favorable and unfavorable judgments on President Clinton, on Kosovo, on the Republican Party, or what have you. The point is that individuals will then know where they are—that they favor or oppose some person or policy—but they may not be sure how they got to that position. If they are asked for reasons, they are likely to create them on the spot. This presents a challenge to the observer—the journalist, or politician, or social scientist—to try to figure out what was the reasoning that went into the conclusion. But there is a structure of reasoning behind it.

This analysis also sheds light on the difference between sets of values held by philosophers and those held by ordinary citizens. The value systems of philosophers—those people whose business it is to propound such systems—are explicit, usually formal, logically consistent, and accompanied by explicit justifications. Ordinary citizens are under no obligation to explicate the logic of their positions or to justify them. Popular moral positions are not explicit and not necessarily consistent. But inconsistency can remain because there is no need to face it. The values come into play in relation to particular moments—whether this be when the individual is a respondent answering a question, a voter in a voting booth, or a citizen deciding whether to write a letter to a representative or attend a protest meeting. In that coming together, there is no need for the development of coherent justifications or a reconciliation of values. The only thing needed is the outcome—the vote, the policy position. If there is a reasoning pattern connected with it, it is often left unarticulated.

The analysis illustrates another general difference between the

²⁰ John M. Basili, ed., *On-Line Cognition in Person Perception* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989).

reasoning process of philosophers and that of citizens. The commonsense reasoning of the latter appears to be more concrete, more tied to specific exemplars. Citizens will use as examples a particular news story, a particular personal event, and analogize from that. They recognize similarity of patterns. Philosophers also use examples, but these tend to be abstractly constructed situations that illustrate a general point—how the willingness of sports fans to pay extra to see Wilt Chamberlain play demonstrates that free markets lead to just distributions or how the dilemma faced by a couple of criminals deciding whether to confess or not demonstrates the difficulty of collective action. Reasoning by analogy is not as logical as reasoning by deduction—but it is reasoning and can be reasonable reasoning at that.

In sum, citizens may appear inconsistent—the worst logical sin—but it is not an unreasonable inconsistency. They are not philosophers, but they get by. Citizens are also not social scientists; they use shortcuts and research techniques that would not pass muster in social science journals. And as social analysts, they also manage to get by.

If ordinary citizens are not moral philosophers or social scientists, what then are they? Perhaps the nearest analogy is that they are legislators, legislating for themselves. They are policymakers and must make decisions. The decisions are narrow; they can decide policy only for themselves. They decide how to vote, they decide whether and on what issues to become politically active, they decide what policies to prefer, they decide how to answer a survey question on some public issue.

Legislation involves both normative and empirical analysis. One needs to know what it is that one wants, which involves having values and goals and, one would hope, the ability to reason about such values and goals. And one needs to be able to analyze the means of achieving one's goals, which involves knowledge of relevant information and the ability to use that information to analyze the consequences of various acts. Thus, the ideal citizen

should be both philosopher and social scientist. But given that no one is paying for their time, given that they have other things to do, citizens may take many shortcuts in their normative reflections and in their social science analyses. The result is not the highest level of reasoning either about values or about facts (or their combination). But it is not unreasonable.

Let's turn to some examples of the public philosophy to see how this works out.

The multiplicity of values and the absence of a need to reconcile them would lead to citizen support for fairly balanced views on issues when there is a conflict among generally accepted values. They may wind up in the middle, a position more consistent with those normative theories that seek to balance or reconcile various views than with those theories that take a clearer position on one side or the other. Consider the following democratic dilemmas.

I began by saying that the terms “democratic” and “government” contain a built-in tension—between democracy, which implies power from the bottom up, and government, which implies power from the top down. It parallels the tension between the legislator as delegate and the legislator as trustee and many other democratic dilemmas involving the need for a citizen voice and the need for effective government that cannot respond to every citizen demand. Citizens—if one reads the results of polls—agree with both positions. They do not want leaders who do nothing but follow the polls or leaders who ignore them. They want both leadership and responsiveness.

Similarly, in relation to their own competence as citizens they are relatively balanced. The average citizen is not a populist—at least that is what survey studies show. Most members of the American public seem to be quite modest about their own capabilities. They believe that most citizens don't know what is best for them, that they don't understand issues and arguments, and that they are too uninformed to make sensible choices in public matters. Nonetheless, more support the view that “every citizen

must have an equal right to decide what is best for the country” than accept the proposition that those of character and intelligence ought to have more voice.²¹ They are not sure they know what’s best, but they do not think anyone else has the right to decide that for them. I find that a somewhat contradictory but actually quite reasonable position.

THE COMPETENT CITIZEN AND THE COMPETENT PUBLIC

Individual citizens may be better citizens than one might expect. However, democratic choices depend, not on the views of any individual citizen, but on the aggregate of citizens. As with the issue of the competence of the individual citizen to function well within a democratic system, there are conflicting views of the capacity of the aggregate of citizens to do so. Various arguments can be and have been educed as to the analytical and/or moral incompetence of citizens in the aggregate:

1. The aggregate is immoral. The argument here is that people in the aggregate may behave in ways that they would find unacceptable if they were acting as individuals—either because their responsibility (to themselves or to others) for acting can be submerged in a group or because group pressures push them to act this way. Mobs, “mass publics,” can be undemocratic or unjust in ways that individuals would not be.
2. The aggregate can distort the positions of the individuals who make it up. Pluralistic ignorance and spirals of silence exist when individual members of a group mistake the views of their fellow citizens but, because of weak

²¹ Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos: Public Attitudes toward Capitalism and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), chap. 3; quotation on p. 79.

- communications or fear of rejection, act in ways that distort what would be the sum of their individual positions.
3. There may be no stable summary of the position of a group due to Arrow problems of aggregation. It may be that a collective view is an oxymoron.

There may be a good deal of validity to each of these reservations about the mass public. But let me focus on the opposite argument: that the public is superior to the individual. Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro in their book *The Rational Public* argue that individual instability of opinion need not be incompatible with a relatively stable set of reasonable preferences among the public as a whole. "Even though individuals may hold only weak and poorly informed opinions, subject to measurement error and random change due to new information, there can still exist a stable, meaningful public opinion based on the underlying central tendencies of individuals' opinions. And sample surveys eliciting the expressed opinions of many individuals at a given moment may quite accurately reveal what collective public opinion looks like."²²

How does this happen? As they put it, "Individuals exposed to random bits of information may err or be misled about an issue and may form policy preferences not well suited to their needs and values; but the public as a whole, so long as the errors are randomly distributed, will make use of all the available information and choose the appropriate policies."²³ The well-known argument comes from Condorcet's jury theorem and was made 200 years ago. The argument is that given modest amounts of information, imperfect individual judgments are more likely to lead to correct aggregate judgments the larger the group of judges. Thus, the jury does better at coming to the truth than would any individual

²² Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 25–26.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

member, and public opinion may be sounder than the opinion of individuals.

But the condition for a Condorcet outcome is that the errors of the several individuals are random. If the individual voters are exposed to a systematic bias in what they hear in one direction or another, the aggregate may not come to the right decision more frequently. It is one of those areas where there is much reasoning, but little empirical work. Larry Bartels has attempted to study this empirically using election studies. His results are not conclusive. "How likely is it that the effects of voter ignorance would persist even in the aggregated choice of a mass electorate? The simple answer is that no one knows."²⁴

One of the more interesting approaches to the relationship between the attitudes of individuals and the aggregate of those attitudes is found in the work of James Stimson. Using some innovative ways of summing up the positions of individuals across a range of issues, he traces the movement across time of the average position of the American public in broad policy orientation—essentially its average position on a left to right dimension of government policy that might be thought of as running from the unfettered free market to the full-fledged welfare state. Though many individuals have unclear and inconsistent positions on these issues, the movement of the position of the citizenry has an interesting regularity. In general the public moves away from extremes. When government policy is off to the left, the public begins to move right; as policy moves right consistent with public opinion, the public moves back to the left. Thus, the public favored a diminution of social services before the Ronald Reagan administration, but when Reagan started to implement those policies it moved back. And this pattern has been repeated—more recently in relation to the Republican Party's movement to the right and its alliance with the religious right in the 1994 election.

²⁴ Larry M. Bartels, "Uninformed Voted: Information Effects in Presidential Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (1996): 200.

The public wants change, but when it sees change going too far, it backs off. Stimson likens the effect to that of a thermostat. When things get too cool, it raises the temperature until it gets too hot, and then it lowers it. Such moderation can look like inconsistency, and to some extent it is. And it can be maddening, I assume, to politicians who think they have won the support of the public for a new direction to policy only to find the public turning against them as soon as they try to move in the new direction. But the position seems not unreasonable. In this sense, the civic aggregate may indeed be better than the civic individual.

THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC CITIZEN

Let us consider the other set of reasons why one might oppose equal citizen voice: that citizens are morally incompetent and hold values incompatible with an ongoing democratic polity. It is hard to delineate what values are needed for democratic functioning. Let me focus on two that seem basic and have the advantage of having been studied empirically. These are having some consideration for the public good and having tolerance for opposing and unpopular views.

Let us begin with the issue of the consideration of the common good. The ordinary citizen is commonly believed to be a narrow, somewhat selfish, parochial person, concerned only with his or her narrow world and seeing the broader society as a projection of his or her inner needs. If that is the case, who will think of the common good? I realize that this is an issue only for those who believe that citizens can and ought to think beyond their narrow self-interest. From a more economic point of view, narrow self-interest is what we would expect and, probably, what we would want. I cannot get into that debate, so let me state that I think it good if people think about the common good. In any case, let's see if they do. And for this I can return to my own research on citizen activism.

The interest in this subject for myself and my collaborators actually came from a different direction: from our concern with the paradox of participation. This is a puzzle derived from the conclusion of rational actor theory that it is irrational for the individual citizen to participate in politics unless there is some selective benefit. To participate for some collective outcome (something in the public good) makes no sense from this perspective since the individual, through, say, a vote, cannot have much effect on a policy outcome and can benefit from it even if inactive. Thus, the individual ought to take a free ride. The argument is well known, and I won't elaborate it here. And the paradox is that, despite the seemingly impeccable logic, millions in fact participate.

Our attempt to understand the paradox led us to a better understanding of the ordinary citizen as private and as public person. We did something rarely done: we asked individuals why they were active. More specifically, we asked them what gratifications they obtained from their activity.²⁵ It is, of course, tricky to ask the kind of question I am referring to: to ask people to tell you why they did something or what they got out of some action. Citizens may give what they assume to be the socially correct answer. One way we obtained what I think are compelling answers to the question of why people participate is by asking them to name the issue that animated their activity. Why did they take the time and effort to do what they did? For some activities such as voting the reasons for acting may be many and somewhat uncertain. But we were asking about specific acts: thus the motivation may be easier to recognize and the purpose ought to be clearer to the actor. Most of us know what it is we want when we write a letter to a representative or when we take part in a protest or go to a community meeting.

We found their answers compelling. Sometimes, they describe

²⁵ The data from these questions and the full analysis of the material discussed here can be found in Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), chap. 4.

the issues on which they are active as involving narrow selective benefits, which would seem to fit the expectations of rational actor theory. But narrow issues were relatively rare. The issues or problems they say animated their activity are ones they describe as affecting many people, the community, or the nation, not just themselves. Indeed, they are usually issues easily labeled collective. And when we ask for descriptions of these issues, they fit that categorization. We believe that these are sincere descriptions of their motivation.

In general, we found that some of the reasons why people are active fit the narrow, material, self-interested, selective benefit categories that social choice theory might lead us to expect: to get a job, a contract for one's firm, or a particular government benefit. Some activity is animated by such concerns, but not much. More is animated by other concerns. Some are active for what can be called social reasons: they enjoy working with others, or they want to please a friend or someone else with whom they want to be in good repute. More still get gratification from doing what they consider to be right—they are active because it is their civic duty, or because, as they say, they think of themselves as the kind of person who cares about social matters. From a rational actor perspective, such motivations can be—and have been—considered self-interested gratifications. But that makes self-interest a rather broad and not very useful rubric. And, even if we subsume social and psychic gratifications under the rubric of self-interested benefits, it does seem to make a difference whether someone who is active is so for a material benefit or to satisfy a feeling of good citizenship. The latter feels a lot more like civic virtue. Lastly, many of the answers as to why people participate explicitly invoke a public purpose: to make the community or nation better, to influence public policy. And such public purposes clearly do not fit rational actor calculations.

In sum, the people we studied act more often as civically minded citizens than as narrowly selfish individuals. Aristotle may not be right that humans are by nature political animals, but

the economists are not right either that they are rational calculators of narrow, individual self-interest. In sum, if by civic virtue we mean “the disposition to further public over private good in deliberation,”²⁶ citizens appear to manifest it—indeed, they proclaim their commitment to it.

This is all consistent with another body of literature that shows that citizens evaluate policies and candidates as public issues, not in terms of the specific effects on them. In research on attitudes toward unemployment policy, Kay L. Schlozman and I found that individuals (in deciding what policies to support or what candidates to choose) were guided more by the national situation in terms of unemployment than by their own experience.²⁷ Similar findings exist about attitudes toward racial matters, schooling, American involvement in war, medical care, and other issues. General commitments (self-identification as liberal or conservative, party affiliation, general attitudes on matters of race, etc.) are more likely than the impact of the issues on a person’s narrower self-interest to predict the specific policy preferences of an individual or a voting decision.²⁸

A comment on rational actor theory and the understanding of ordinary citizens: Surely, if there is a candidate for a theory of citizen involvement in public life that would universally explain citizen behavior, it is rational actor theory. It is, in one form or another, appearing as an explanation of behavior in many fields outside of economics, from whence it came, and certainly in political science.

²⁶ Quoted in Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 14

²⁷ Kay L. Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *Injury to Insult* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

²⁸ See, for example, Richard R. Lau, Thad A. Brown, and David O. Sears, “Self-Interests and Civilians’ Attitudes towards the War in Vietnam,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42 (1978): 464–83; David O. Sears, C. P. Hensles, and L. K. Speer, “Whites’ Opposition to Busing: Self-Interest or Symbolic Racism,” *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979): 369–84; and David O. Sears, Richard R. Lau, Tom R. Tyler, and Harris M. Allen, Jr., “Self-Interest vs. Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting,” *American Political Science Review* 74 (1980): 670–84.

As I indicated, the concern that my colleagues and I had for the motivations behind citizen activity derives from the difficulty that rational actor theory has with citizen participation: the fact that many people who ought to be free riders are in fact active. Our analysis of the motives that individuals have for such activity suggests that, if we take their statements to be true—which I argue we can more or less—they show that citizens are active for many reasons. Some but not many of the reasons fit a rational actor, narrow, self-interested cost-benefit calculation model. Some might fit if the scope of benefits is extended to include the psychic benefits of being a good citizen, though if that is done the theory loses discriminatory power. And some motivations—such as the desire to influence public policy, which is quite common—do not fit the theory at all.

But earlier in my lectures, I mentioned our analysis of the strategies used by those people who act as political recruiters—the people who make telephone calls or in other ways contact citizens to get them to give money or time to a campaign or a political cause. I said that they act as rational recruiters. We find we can model their strategies quite well using cost-benefit calculations. We show, for instance, that they deploy information in a rational manner to find those people who are most likely to say yes to a request and, having said yes, have the capacity to make contributions to the campaign or the cause. They quite rationally follow the advice of Willie Sutton, the famous American bank robber, who, when asked why he robbed banks, replied: “That’s where the money is.” In addition, they use personal connections in a rationally calculating manner.

How do these parts go together—our inability to model the activity of citizens in general in rational actor terms and our ability to model the activity of political recruiters when they seek activists? The answer sheds light on the circumstances under which rational actor theory works and is useful for understanding citizen

political behavior. We could not model the reasons why individuals become recruiters—why they decide to spend their time on the telephone calling others to support some political cause. They have many and varied motives. Some do so out of narrow self-interest—they are hired to do that work. Others do it for social reasons—perhaps their friends are working in the same campaign. Others do it out of commitment to the cause. As with political activity in general, there are many reasons for becoming a recruiter.

But once people have decided to be active as recruiters, they pursue their recruitment activities in a carefully calculated and efficient manner. They look for people who have the money to contribute, have past records of contribution, are known to be supporters of the cause—all characteristics that make them useful targets of requests.

The reason, we believe, that cost-benefit calculations work in the recruitment case is that there is a well-defined task (to mobilize support) and such calculations can be made. It is similar to a market decision where one wants to get the most for the least cost.

In general, we found that rational actor approaches to citizen activity fit some contexts and not others. They are sometimes quite useful, but not always.²⁹ We have made that point at several conferences in the United States, and the reaction has been interesting. The conclusion has been attacked. The grenades have been thrown from both directions—and, in a way, for the same reason. Rational actor fundamentalists have objected to the idea that the theory is *sometimes* useful; they would prefer to think it is *always* useful. The rational actor rejectionists—of whom there are many, though they are not as well organized—have also objected to the notion that the theory is *sometimes* useful. They would prefer to think it is *rarely or never* useful. So be it.

²⁹ For a fuller discussion of the uses of rational actor theory for the study of political participation, see Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, "Rational Action and Political Activity" (unpublished manuscript).

FREE SPEECH AND TOLERANCE

There is another basic value that underlies democracy and that we might hope would be shared by ordinary citizens: tolerance of the views of others. Here is an issue that has been studied a good deal by social scientists and that is closely related to normative issues. The issue is that of stability in a society with multiple, incompatible doctrines. John Rawls assumes that in any pluralistic society, there will inevitably be a number of comprehensive doctrines that will conflict with each other. How then can they live side by side? His assumption as to the nature of the doctrines held by a democratic population and his description of the solution fit the clear and comprehensive principles often found in political philosophy: differing comprehensive and internally consistent conceptions of the good exist side by side. This would cause instability in a society committed to peaceful and noncoercive means of political decision-making—that is, in a democratic society. Stability is maintained and the strain of multiple incompatible doctrines is moderated by a free-standing overlapping consensus on a democratic process that involves tolerating alternative doctrines. The conception of a fair democratic procedure is free standing in that it is not derived from any of the competing conceptions of the good.

This is an area in which there is a fairly long tradition of empirical research on what citizens actually believe about the variety of doctrines to be found in a democratic society (not cited by Rawls), and about whether they are committed to some overarching conception of a democratic process that would lead them to tolerate doctrines incompatible with the ones in which they believe.³⁰ What does the empirical literature tell us about the issue? The

³⁰ See, among others, Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties: A Cross-section of the Nation Speaks Its Mind* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955); John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Paul M. Sniderman et al., "Principled Tolerance and the American Mass Public," *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (1989): 19–44. For a discussion of the relation of Rawls's work to empirical material on free speech, see George Klosko, "Rawls's Political Philosophy and American Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 87 (1993): 348–60.

matter is a subject of debate; there are various studies done with somewhat differing assumptions and different methods, so I cannot give a definitive reply. But the studies are illuminating about the issue.

To begin with, it appears that political philosophers such as Rawls—as one might expect—take doctrines of the good more seriously than do ordinary citizens. It may be that comprehensive competing doctrines of the good exist, but most citizens do not hold such a doctrine. Competing doctrines may not be that hard edged, so there can be overlapping conceptions of the good. Such conceptions need not be mutually exclusive among individuals or groups of individuals. If people have different conceptions of what is right in relation to the family and the economy and religion and the polity, they may disagree with their fellows on some things but agree on others. This overlapping applies to social groups as well. African Americans in the United States are quite at odds with many of the religious right when it comes to matters of economic policy—but not that far away when it comes to such issues as abortion and homosexuality. Such overlapping consensus—perhaps better called by an older name in political science, cross-cutting cleavages—can hold a system together.

What about evidence of a free-standing commitment to tolerance of competing conceptions of the good? Much of the earlier literature suggested that this was not something on which to count as a support for democracy. The studies of Samuel Stouffer and others found that most citizens did subscribe to what seemed to be a free-standing commitment to the general principles expressed in the Bill of Rights. The hitch was that these citizens did not seem to deduce from those principles a more specific commitment to tolerate unpopular groups. Almost all supported a general right to free speech, but many opposed allowing someone to speak in their community if that person espoused communism or atheism.³¹

There are several possible interpretations of this phenomenon:

³¹ Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*.

citizens may merely be giving lip service to support for the Bill of Rights (a positive symbol), or may be inconsistent in their positions (an illustration of inadequate logic), or may be placing one value (free speech) against another (the desire to protect democracy or religion from attack). But whatever the interpretation, there did not seem to be much comfort for those who would base democratic stability on a free-standing commitment to a more open society.

The work of John Sullivan and his associates modified Stouffer's design and carried the research forward. He and his associates argued that Stouffer's examples of groups to which people might deny free speech rights were mostly groups that would be anathema to conservatives—socialists, Communists, atheists. If one expands, and lets the individual choose his or her enemy (that is, respondents are asked to name groups they really dislike and then asked whether they would accord them free speech opportunities), then intolerance is found to be even more endemic. Similar research in Britain comes to a similar conclusion. What Sullivan's research seems to show is that people report commitment to some free-standing principles of free speech and tolerance and may indeed have such commitments—but when it comes right down to it, their opposition to people espousing doctrines they dislike swamps their commitment. Again this can be seen not as intolerance, but rather as a greater concern about social stability. The least-liked groups in the United States include the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party; in Britain, the National Front and Sinn Fein.

The studies did suggest several mechanisms by which this general expression of principle coupled with specific rejection of free speech did not create instability or a loss of such freedoms. The mechanisms include the fact that those citizens least committed to freedom of speech for specific groups were also the least educated and the least active citizens. Their views may be more threatening

to democratic freedoms, but they are not likely to act on them. The argument was that intolerance among the mass public did not harm democracy—except perhaps in times of mass political arousal—because it was irrelevant. The apathy and ignorance of the intolerant mass neutralized its potentially deleterious effects. Elites—more active and more tolerant than the mass—saved democracy. Stouffer found community leaders to be much more supportive of democratic free speech than was the average citizen. And the impressive massive survey work of Miller, Timpson, and Lessnoff in Britain confirms this.³² Similarly, John L. Sullivan et al. found legislators in the U.S.A., the U.K., and several other countries to be much more supportive of civil liberties for unpopular groups.³³

One more body of research is relevant to this topic. Paul Sniderman and his associates, using some sophisticated analytical techniques, found what strikes me as good evidence for a free-standing commitment to tolerance. People who are tolerant of one group are tolerant of others regardless of the closeness of the group to the individual's own preferred position. Thus, tolerance is free standing and does not depend (certainly not fully) on one's views of the substance of the doctrine one is tolerating or not. Put another way, among citizens who are generally tolerant, they are more supportive of the free speech of groups they oppose than intolerant citizens are tolerant of the free speech of groups of which they approve. A generally tolerant racial liberal is more tolerant of free speech for a racial bigot than an intolerant racial bigot is for other racial bigots.

Sniderman and his associates call such general tolerance across groups and doctrines principled tolerance. But it is interesting

³² Miller, Timpson, and Lessnoff, *Political Culture in Contemporary Britain*.

³³ John L. Sullivan et al., "Why Politicians Are More Tolerant: Selective Recruitment and Socialization among Elites in Britain, Israel, New Zealand, and the United States," *British Journal of Political Science* 55 (November 1993): 51.

what they mean by this. It is not that these principled tolerators have explained that they hold to such a position because it derives from some general view of society or a general theory of democracy. They have given no such justification, and Sniderman et al. suggest they would not be able to do so if asked. Rather their analysis suggests that principled tolerance means general tolerance; tolerance that transcends one's support for or opposition to the views tolerated. It is, thus, a good example of a Rawlsian free-standing commitment to a political principle of justice.

What still seems to be missing is a principled commitment arrived at by reasoning from the nature of a pluralistic democratic system. Rather than coming to their general tolerant position by reasoning from a more abstract set of principles, Sniderman and associates present evidence (based on how one instance of support for free speech relates to others) that these tolerant citizens reason by analogy. They focus on some vivid example of tolerance—on an example of free speech for some group—and then support tolerance for other groups because they see the situation as similar. It is an example of framing. A particular situation—tolerance for some group—is categorized as an example of free speech. If tolerance of another group is seen to fit the category, the individual favors free speech again. Principled consistency is not a matter of a logically connected structure of argument, but of a connected set of recognizable objects.

But this still leaves out reasoning. Is there really none? The new standard view of citizens derived from the cognitive social psychological literature is that citizens reason their way to conclusions through a commonsense, results-oriented process. They recognize specific patterns in specific cases; they put together a variety of considerations and come to a conclusion. It is a form of logic and reasoning. It differs, however, from the reasoning of philosophers in that citizens do not tell you how they got there. They may reason, but do not give you their reasons.

The difference is not trivial. Reasons and their public statement are crucial if democratic decision-making is to involve deliberation and is to be more than a clash of preferences or wills or interests. We are supposed to be able to reason together—to argue and persuade. It is too bad if citizens come to decisions that are reasonable, that are consistent with their set of stored considerations, but they cannot tell you why.

But again, maybe we do not hear citizens reason because they have not had the chance. We ask specific questions and get their responses, but do not ask them why they said what they said. However, experimental studies where one modifies the wording of questions and the presentation of issues do seem to show us a reasoning process. We change the frame and the respondent changes the response. This, as I have suggested, is not necessarily weakness of belief, but what we expect from democratic discourse—desiccated though the examples may be. In a sense, changing the frame of the questions is saying to someone, as we say in discussion: you are saying yes, but have you thought about the following consideration? Oh yes, you respond, now that you mention that, I think the opposite.

But in these experiments, the individuals do not explicate. Maybe they can't, but maybe they can if we ask them, and maybe they can if we ask them and they have some time to think about it. They are faced with important issues that they have not confronted, and need some time to reflect.

What if we give people time to think and ask them to explain themselves? There is a tradition of this kind of research, the tradition of depth interviews. They make it difficult for us to generalize because the numbers are too small. But if they are selected more or less at random—not interviews of our professional colleagues or our students—they give us a good hint at the reasoning processes that would be found in a larger sample of the population. This is the tradition of the work of Robert Lane and Jennifer Hochschild,

of the discussion groups of William Gamson and Roberta Segal.³⁴ Let me illustrate what can be found by looking behind some of the answers to questions about civil liberties.

Herbert McCloskey conducted pilot interviews in order to design the forced choice questions for his large study of attitudes toward free speech. Dennis Chong unearthed this trove of conversational material on free speech, in which people were asked about their views and were allowed to reason about the issues.³⁵ Issues of free speech almost always involve conflicting considerations. Free speech is desirable for lots of reasons, but the problem arises, of course, when it is speech for people who will say bad things: things that offend others, that hurt others (sometimes children), that lead to social unrest. Ambivalence about free speech ought to be expected from most people who are reflective. And this is what is found in the discussions with interviewers. People change their minds. They say they favor free speech, but they are afraid that people will be convinced by Nazis or by Communists. As one woman says, she believes in free speech but opposes letting groups of this sort open a bookstore. As she puts it, “. . . that’s trampling on their rights a bit, but maybe to protect other people, I would say no [to allowing them to open a bookstore].” Another moves the other way, opposing free speech rights for various radical groups. But when the interviewer asks in general about people “who stand up and advocate the forcible overthrow of our government,” she replies, “. . . that would be in a sense what the Nazis and communists were trying to do. They do have the right, they

³⁴ Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962); Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Roberta S. Sigel, *Ambition and Accommodation: How Women View Gender Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁵ See Dennis Chong, “How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties,” *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1993): 867–99.

do have the right. I know they do. . . . That's what freedom is all about. Freedom of speech. Yeah. I'm all just doing a topsy turvy here. I know they have the right and our government isn't perfect and they might, you know, bring out a lot of things that would change for the better, but I would not want to go to the extreme of turning all of a sudden communist. . . ."

One further example illustrates how people are likely to come out if they reflect on such matters. James Kuklinski carried out an interesting experiment.³⁶ He asked about free speech rights for members of the Ku Klux Klan and tried to get answers that were more or less reflective. Some respondents were told to answer with whatever they first thought; others to reflect on the consequences of the position they espoused. He found a not insignificant difference. Interestingly, it was not that the more reflective respondents were more favorable to free speech opportunities for the KKK; they were less so. More reflection did not raise the importance of the free speech perspective in the balance of values, but apparently led them to think of the social harm coming from speech whose content they found hateful. Reflection did not lead to more tolerance, but to less. There is a point to be made here. I am not sure whether these results would always hold up. But they contradict the assumption we sometimes make that people, if they only reflected, would become enlightened and more committed to free speech. They may indeed come to a different position on reflection—but maybe it will not be the one we imagine.

In sum, the reasoning found in these interviews is not elegant; the individual has not thought much about it and is deciding on the spot. But one cannot expect most people to have spent much time mulling over such issues, and the considerations are reasonable.

³⁶ James Kuklinski et al., "The Cognitive and Affective Bases of Political Tolerance Judgments," *American Journal of Political Science* 35 (1991): 1–27.

THE EDUCATED CITIZEN AND PARTICIPATION

One last point about the relationship between equal participation and quality participation: Though I have suggested that the ordinary citizen is not as benighted as one might imagine, this does not mean that all citizens are equally competent. Some are more so than others, the biggest predictor of such competence being education. It is no wonder that almost all students of citizenship have hoped for a more educated citizenry, and some, of course, have argued for special participatory rights for the better educated—whether that be achieved through extra votes for university graduates or through literacy tests. In fact, one need not have policies that favor the educated as participants, because they participate more than others anyway.

This fact illustrates the dilemma of unequal participation. Let's explore this a bit further. The best predictor of political activity is education. In our research on participation, my colleagues and I tried to answer the question: why is education so potent a predictor of political activity? Was it that it made people more informed? Made them feel more efficacious? Made it easier for them to see connections between their values and preferences and governmental action? Was it that it inculcated the values of citizenship—that one ought to be a participant? Did it increase the store of resources that people had—skills that made one an effective participant or income useful in making political contributions? Did it put the individuals into networks so that they were surrounded by others who were active and by others who could help them act effectively? The answer was—to use the forced choice language of tests and surveys—all of the above. Education fosters activity though its effect on information, skills, values, resources, networks, and more. No wonder it is so potent. Furthermore, the potency grows after education ends.

The educated citizen is not only more active; he or she is a better citizen. The educated citizen is more informed, has a more co-

herent or consistent set of political values, and can make better connections between means and ends. Educated citizens have other virtues: they are in general more supportive of the rules of democracy, more tolerant of unpopular voices, more committed to communal rather than individualistic goals. Some simple data from our studies will make this clear. Compare individuals with no college education with college graduates. The latter are more active in any of the activities we measure, and by a long shot. They are, for instance, four times as likely to have contacted a government official (a good way to express political voice) than is someone with only a high school education. They get twice as many information items right. When they contact, they are four times as likely to deal with an issue that has broad relevance, rather than some issue limited to themselves and their family; they have, thus, more civic concern. And in other ways they are exemplary. They are five times as likely to support the right of someone who opposes religion to speak in the community. And on and on. They are better citizens.

I don't want to overstate this case. There is the possibility that we give educated citizens more benefit of the doubt when it comes to civic virtue than they deserve. And this may be because they speak our language. Some early research on the civic-mindedness of citizens found that better-educated citizens were more likely to have a long time horizon and to think of the public good when contemplating social and economic issues. Less well educated citizens and newer immigrants had a shorter time horizon and thought of policies from the point of view of their immediate impact on themselves.³⁷ I think there is some truth to this, but many years of looking at what respondents say about public issues have also made it clear that those who are more articulate have little difficulty in expressing their own self-interest in broad social terms. In our research on unemployment we found that less well educated

³⁷ James Q. Wilson and Edward C. Banfield, "Public-Regardingness as a Value Premise in Voting Behavior," *American Political Science Review* 58 (1964): 876-87.

people need a job and ask for a job. More educated respondents need a job and discuss the problem of unemployment—while also asking for a job. Neither I nor my colleagues who have sent in research proposals to the National Science Foundation ever argued that the research funding would allow us to do what we like better to do (research) than what we might otherwise have to do (teach) or that the funding would increase the prestige of our research institute, etc. But it may be (just may be) that some of us have such things in mind—as well as having a sincere commitment to the substance of the research and its value to scholarship and the understanding of society.

It is to the good that the educated are more active. That education fosters activity means it fosters better democratic participation. But the educated do not differ from the rest of the citizenry only in their greater competence and commitment to democracy. They are also wealthier, more likely to be male, more likely to come from the dominant race and ethnic groups. They are less likely to support spending on programs to aid the poor. More important, perhaps, they are less likely to face the deprivations faced by those with less education. On a large number of measures of need (the need to put off medical treatment, the need for better housing, etc.) they differ substantially from those who did not attend college. In sum, educated activists are more civically competent, which makes for a more enlightened input into the democratic policy process; they are wealthier and more advantaged, which means they have policy preferences and needs different from those of the population as a whole, and that makes for a more biased input into the policy process. Insofar as the participation of the educated is driven by the democratic values of tolerance or by the civic beliefs they acquire in school, this creates a better citizenry. Insofar as their activity is driven by the components of their social class position (their income, the networks of connections that come with various jobs), this creates the more biased polity.

We may want an educated citizenry, but we wind up with a wealthy one.³⁸

CONCLUSION

Where does this all take us in relation to citizens as social scientists and moral philosophers? Individual citizens fall far short of the reasoning of either group. But they have ways of making not unreasonable choices about what to support and what to do. In sum, the individual citizen is not a philosopher; he or she could not articulate a coherent social philosophy, nor give full justifications for the positions held or the political choices made. But the individual citizen is—as the political scientist V. O. Key made clear—not a fool.

Is the ordinary citizen a rational actor, calculating from a self-interested perspective the costs and benefits of his or her own actions and the actions of others? The answer may depend on how narrowly or broadly one defines self-interest and what one considers to be costs and to be benefits. But using any definition not so broad as to make the question vacuous, the answer would seem to me to be: sometimes. It depends on the venue. Citizens do think about the collectivity when it comes to public issues. They think about their narrow interests as well. And they balance the two. It

³⁸ My colleagues and I, in our studies of political activity, tried to disentangle the effects of education and income on civic activity and, in turn, on the consequences of that activity for the kinds of messages sent to the government. We linked three components of a model: what social characteristic is connected to the activity (allowing us to distinguish the effect of education from the effect of income); what was the nature of the political activity (distinguishing activities that involve giving time from those that involve giving money); and what were the preferences or values that were given greater voice in the participatory process. We found that time-based activity derived directly from education while money-based activity came from income and only indirectly from education through its effect on income. In turn, the income-driven, money-based activity led to a greater voice for the affluent and policies that favored the wealthy; the education-driven, time-based activity led to a greater voice for the informed and for those who were more tolerant.

could not be otherwise. Rabbi Hillel wrote: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?” The average person agrees.

Is the ordinary citizen the free and equal person that Rawls assumes, with a capacity for a conception of justice and of the good? Again the answer may depend on exactly what such conceptions entail. But if one looks at what we know about individual citizens—and looks at both the representative but sketchy information we get from surveys and the more rounded picture we get from depth studies—the answer would seem to be pretty much yes.

Does this mean that representative government with its ability to refine the preferences of the people can or should be replaced by more direct citizen control—through referendums, or polls, or other direct democratic means? I hope no one takes that to be the implication of my remarks. There is a long distance between the subtle complexities of policy-making and the preferences of ordinary citizens as revealed by surveys and others means. The public itself, so it would seem, does not favor that much unfiltered citizen voice. But I do suggest that the collectivity of citizens can add useful input to the political process, input that will make the government more democratically responsive. I am not sure that the input ought to be labeled wisdom, but it is not foolishness. Wisdom may, in any case, be in somewhat short supply throughout the political process—among ordinary citizens, and among our leaders as well. But that is another topic.