

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
Posc 150**

**DEMOCRACY AS ACCOUNTABILITY**

I. CONTENTS:

- A. "Tragedy of the Commons"  
1. What happens when humans act rationally.

II. SUMMARY:

- A. Read on your own  
B. Current events can be described in "substantive" terms and as political theater.  
1. In American culture the latter dominates.  
C. One understanding of government:  
1. People have rights that need protections.  
2. Government is a contract or arrangement that protects and/or expands rights.  
3. Various "philosophies" answer  
i. what rights need protection, and  
ii. how far a government should go in protecting them.  
4. Theories of government can be ordered according to how much government is needed to protect rights.  
D. But there is another justification" for government that the tragedy of the commons illustrates.

III. WHEN HUMANS ARE RATIONAL:

- A. Reprinted from last set of notes.  
B. **The following is a parable.**  
C. \*"Tragedy of the Commons" (Russell Hardin)  
1. Remember the star means "understand the implications of the story or parable."  
2. ○State of nature: fertile pasture  
i. Limited "carrying capacity": only a finite number of sheep can graze on in the meadow. Otherwise the grass will be entirely consumed.  
ii. The field is a public area or commons that no one owns.  
3. Four **rational** farmers  
i. They want to maximize wool or mutton production at least cost to themselves.  
ii. That is, they want to maximize utility.  
4. ○The more sheep one farmer pastures the higher the production and the greater his or her utility.  
5. ○Consequently, each farmer wants the following:  
i. Graze as many of his/her own sheep as possible.

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- ii. Limit number size of the others' flocks.
6. ○Why limit others?
- i. Because one farmer can expand his/her flock without destroying the commons and hence maximize profit or utility.
7. ○But this works only so long as the others limit themselves.
- i. The commons is a limited good.
8. Now the great conundrum: each farmer being rational tries to maximize utility, but the commons simply cannot sustain ever expanding herds.
- i. If they all act rationally as described above (see Number 4), the commons will soon be destroyed (see Number 1-i above).
- ii. That is, individuals acting alone will not restrain themselves.
- 1) Why? Each wants the others to restrain themselves while he or she continues to expand.
- 2) Each has an incentive to be a **free rider**; that is, consume a good without paying for it.
- 3) But they all want this situation and so none is restrained.
- iii. Hardin, an economist, puts it this way: the use of the commons "is tragic because "each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase [the size of his flock] without limit--in a world that is limited."
9. What is to be done?
- i. Only an "outside force" or power, an entity that can impose its will on the farmers, can save the situation.
- ii. Someone or something must **enforce** discipline on these rational actors.
10. ✱ A logical candidate is **government**.

#### IV. WHAT DOES "DEMOCRACY" MEAN? - RIGHTS:

- A. Democracy is one answer to the question "what kind of government?"
1. But of course we need to define the term.
- B. Two part definition:
1. Democracy as freedoms.
2. Democracy as decision making process.
- C. Freedoms and rights
1. ○Democracy as **political freedom**
- i. ✓Individual rights and liberties like freedom of religion, speech, property.
- ii. A negative conception of political rights.
- 1) Political rights usually involve freedom *from* government interference rather than a right to have (or an entitlement to) something.
2. ○Democracy as **economic freedom**
- i. ✓Job, health care, retirement fund
- ii. Positive versus negative rights: a right to have something

- iii. Questions:
  - 1) Does someone living in poverty have the same effective rights as a wealthy person?
  - 2) How valuable are political rights to those who are malnourished or ill?
  - 3) Consider two countries, both having identical constitutions guaranteeing political rights and freedom. In one 30 percent of the population lives in poverty; in the other no one does. Are they equally democratic, in the sense of democracy as freedom?
- 3.  Democracy and enlightened understanding: psychological rights
  - i.  Knowing what government is doing; what candidates stand for.
  - ii. Robert Dahl: "Each citizen ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering and validating...the choice on the matter to be decided that would best serve the citizen's interests."
  - iii.  Proposition: democracy must include enlightened understanding.
- D. \* General proposition: rights are a necessary condition of democracy but by themselves do not constitute it.

V. WHAT DOES "DEMOCRACY" MEAN? - GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE:

- A. \*Literally, government of the people.
  - 1. Called participatory, **direct**, popular democracy
- B. The source of a government's **legitimacy**; that is, it's right to command obedience from it's citizen's comes from popular sovereignty.
  - 1. Read "Popular Sovereignty" on the web site.
- C. \*An essential element of democracy is citizen participation in the making of public (authoritative) policies.
  - 1. The word means government **by** the people
- D.  Obstacles to direct democracy
  - 1. "Logistical" problems
    - i. Does direct democracy only work in small communities.
    - ii. Complexity of issues
    - iii. International affairs and the "global village"
  - 2. Is government of and by the masses desirable?
    - i. Are the "masses asses"?
      - 1) Do people have the knowledge, interest, experience, skills, temperament, patience, tolerance to govern?
      - 2) Many, many American's argue that there must be a "buffer" between the government and the people.
      - 3) Certainly the founders felt this way.
  - 3.  **Popular or direct democracy is a contested concept.**

VI. DEMOCRACY AS ACCOUNTABILITY :

- A.  **Republican** form of government:

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1. A republic is a form of government in which supreme power rests in citizens and is exercised by representatives chosen by and accountable to them.
- B. ✱The essence of democracy:
1. Citizens must be able to hold leaders or representatives responsible for their action.
  2. That is, citizens must have the ability to judge policies acceptable or unacceptable and to set guidelines for future action.
- C. Accountability assumes a number of conditions that we'll spend the rest of the semester examining.
1. ✱✱A major gauge of democracy is how well it facilitates citizen's holding representatives accountable.
- VII. NEXT TIME:
- A. Closer look at rights.
- B. Reading:
1. Required: Course web site: Cyber Reserve Room, "The Meaning of Popular Sovereignty."  
(<http://www.udel.edu/htr/American/Texts/popular.html>)
  2. Suggested: Articles and analysis of USA Patriot Act are available in the Cyber Reserve Room:
    - i. Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Analysis Of The Provisions Of The USA PATRIOT Act,"  
[Acwww.eff.org/Privacy/Surveillance/Terrorism\\_militias/20011031\\_eff\\_usa\\_patriot\\_analysis.html](http://www.eff.org/Privacy/Surveillance/Terrorism_militias/20011031_eff_usa_patriot_analysis.html)
    - ii. Copy of the act at the Electronic Frontier Foundation website:  
[http://www.eff.org/Privacy/Surveillance/Terrorism\\_militias/20011025\\_hr3162\\_usa\\_patriot\\_bill.html](http://www.eff.org/Privacy/Surveillance/Terrorism_militias/20011025_hr3162_usa_patriot_bill.html)
    - iii. Center for Constitutional Rights, "The USA PATRIOT Act: What's So Patriotic About Trampling on the Bill of Rights?": [http://www.ccr-ny.org/whatsnew/usa\\_patriot\\_act.asp](http://www.ccr-ny.org/whatsnew/usa_patriot_act.asp)
    - iv. CRS, The USA PATRIOT Act: A Legal Analysis (PDF document)  
<http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RL31377.pdf>