PROLOGUE: DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM

Author(s): FREDERICK G. WHELAN

Source: *Nomos*, 1983, Vol. 25, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY (1983), pp. 13-47

Published by: American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24219358

PROLOGUE: DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM

FREDERICK G. WHELAN

I. THE PROBLEM

The concept of democracy, although protean, always makes reference to a determinate community of persons (citizens)—a "'people"—who are collectively self-governing with respect to their internal and external affairs. The process of self-government may be organized in different ways consistently with common usages of the term and our intuitive notions of what democracy means, although individual theorists may defend a best or truest set of democratic institutional arrangements. Still, any democratic theory must face the logically prior and in some ways more fundamental question of the appropriate constitution of the *people* or unit within which democratic governance is to be practiced. I shall argue not only that the drawing of boundaries around these units is a significant problem for democratic theory and practice, but that democratic theory itself offers no clear guidance on the matter. The difficulties posed by controversies regarding boundaries thus present an important practical limit to the scope of democracy as a method of making collective decisions.[1]

Mention of boundary problems suggests territorial disputes involving sovereign states, or entities aspiring to statehood, and it is in this form that the problem arises most conspicuously.

13

More generally, however, the problem is one of defining or bounding not geographical units but the membership of the democratic body, or citizenry; it is in this form that the problem first arises in the more abstract varieties of democratic political theory.

Democracy is sometimes considered, for example, to be an essentially *participatory* mode of collective decision-making, one in which all citizens have an opportunity for involvement in public affairs. While the exact degree, methods, and distribution of participation that are required or desirable in a democracy are debatable, it is clear that some participatory element, at some significant point(s) in the political process, is a necessary and distinguishing feature of a democracy.[2] The participatory formula for democracy, however, presupposes an answer to the prior question: who may participate? Or, how do we determine membership in the group whose members are entitled to participate? And who is to participate in making this decision?

Another common view regards the *majoritarian* principle as the heart of democratic governance: democracy is present where, when a collective decision is to be made, votes are counted (each person, or citizen, having one) and the alternative preferred by the greater number, or at least a plurality of those choosing to vote, is enacted.[3] Any other method, it is said, would place the decision-making power in the hands of some minority, which violates the basic democratic value of equality among the self-governing citizens. Again, this is a formula that may be accepted, although with qualifications. Since only a small proportion of public decisions made in democratic governments can actually be made by majority rule, the practical democrat generally falls back on the free elections of officials as the hallmark of a real-world democracy, assuming that these are generally although indirectly determinative of policies; it is here that the majority principle is applied.[4] All this is no sooner said, however, than we are again faced with the same problem of boundaries: how do we delimit the group within which, for purposes of making a particular decision, votes are to be counted and a majority preference identified? Or, to note a distinction passed over above, how are *citizens*, those with the right to be counted, distinguished from other persons? Major-

ity rule as a procedural principle is not inherently democratic, but must be combined with relatively inclusive qualifications for citizenship. Determination of the criteria or bounds of the citizen body, however, is a matter that is logically prior to the operation of the majority principle, and cannot be solved by it.[5]

A final and more general idea of democracy is that it is government with the *consent* of the governed. This formula is indeterminate with respect to institutional forms, or the procedures by which consent is to be expressed—questions on which consent theorists have historically differed.[6] Again, however, we may always ask: *whose* consent is required? Or, within what group of people must public policies and laws win the requisite approval or acquiescence? To say simply the consent of "the governed" suggests that this is an arbitrary matter, that democratic theory requires only that consent be obtained for public decisions within political boundaries that are themselves the product of historical accidents, and usually of other-than-democratic forces. But this seems contradictory: it may well be the case that the appropriate boundaries, or the extent and composition of the community, is itself something about which the people involved have preferences; so if democracy is government by consent, then this too is a matter on which, in a democracy, consent ought to be determinative.[7]

The problem of determining the proper boundaries of the self-governing unit thus arises in all forms of democratic theory, and it therefore can be discussed without entering into the debates that arise among proponents of various specialized versions of democracy. Whatever form a democracy takes, collectively binding decisions are made, laws and policies are enacted, and these things are done for and in one way or another by a particular group or *people* that is set apart—and *bound* together[8]—for the purposes of self-government from other people or peoples, who are correspondingly excluded. Democratic theories usually focus on the internal decision-making arrangements, taking for granted the prior existence of a well-defined group with respect to which the question of democratic governance arises. But while individuals, and humanity as a whole, are entities that are naturally given, groups of people sharing characteristics that obviously destine them for collective self-government are not—or, at least, theories that assert oth-

erwise are seriously open to question. The establishment of po-
litical boundaries, or the formation of a group of people shar-
ing a common political identity, on which a democracy can be
erected, is a matter that may occasionally appear to have been
satisfactorily resolved by history, but it is often a matter of con-
tinuing controversy and conflict. It is itself a matter of political
decision, actually or potentially: boundary-drawing, and the de-
termination of political membership, are perhaps the most fun-
damental political decisions. Democratic theory then cannot
simply take the matter for granted. Democracy is advanced by
its advocates as the sole legitimate method for making political
decisions; democratic norms accordingly suggest that these de-
cisions, like others, ought to be made with the consent and par-
ticipation of the people involved, or by the will of the majority
of them. Boundaries comprise a problem, however, that is in-
soluble within the framework of democratic theory, and it may
be that democracy is practicable only when a historically given
solution of this issue (justifiable or not, by some theory other
than democratic theory) is acceptable. The following argument
to this effect is not intended to discredit democratic theory, but
only to establish one of its inherent limitations.

II. THE ALL-AFFECTED PRINCIPLE

Perhaps the most intuitively plausible proposal with respect
to the proper scope of democratic governance is that all those
people who are affected by a particular law, policy, or decision
ought to have a voice in making it. Woodrow Wilson appears
to have implied some such principle when he called for the
"settlement of every question, whether of territory, of sover-
eignty, of economic arrangement, or of political relationship,
upon the basis of the free acceptance of that settlement by the
people immediately concerned;"[9] recent democratic theorists
have frequently expressed the same idea.[10] The all-affected
principle would thus distinguish those who are qualified to be
citizens with respect to a particular decision from other persons
by reference to the content, or the prospective impact, of the
decision. Applied to the different types of democratic theory,
this formula indicates the appropriate scope of participation,

or of majority rule, or of the consent requirement; in practice this formula has often been advocated by proponents of a more participatory and egalitarian form of democracy than that prevailing in contemporary states, in which, it is said, many of the people who are actually affected by social decisions are rarely consulted, at least in any direct fashion.

I shall argue shortly that the all-affected principle is an untenable proposal; first, however, two aspects of its *prima facie* plausibility may be noted. This proposal appears to be offered in a spirit of defensiveness: it seems to conceive of social decisions as normally imposing burdens or costs on the passive many, and its intent seems to be to provide people with the means of protecting themselves, to the end either of avoiding these costs or of seeing that they are distributed more evenly. Such a defensive attitude—traditionally with respect to government, more recently with respect to concentrated economic power—has historically been an important part of the demand for democracy; the right to participate in government, like other rights, is (at least) an instrument with which individuals can safeguard their important interests against invasion or deprivation. As such this principle is morally plausible; it is perhaps not so intuitively clear that the recipients of benefits should have a voice in the decision to confer the benefits, although this is a decision that affects them. The applicability of the principle, in this perspective, depends on whether a given decision-making entity is regarded as (typically, or on balance) a source of burdens or of benefits; where the answer is mixed, as is presumably the case with the state and other relevant entities, the force of the principle is blurred, although it may be responded that wherever there is a question of costs, or of weighing relative costs and benefits, the potential bearers of the costs should have a voice.

The all-affected principle in democratic theory, furthermore, resembles the usual solution to the problem of scope in formal utilitarian theory, and may even be derivable as a political application of it; it may therefore derive strength from the appeal of this larger moral theory. Utilitarianism holds that the right action (or decision) is that which in the circumstances produces the greatest net increase in happiness or welfare of those affected by it. The utilitarian principle may serve as a prescrip-

tion for individual choices, and as such its requirements are
clear, although they encounter formidable difficulties, both ep-
istemological (knowing of what others' happiness consists) and
intellectual (calculating correctly about means). It may also serve
as a standard for political decision-making, prescribing that
public policy aim at the greatest overall welfare of those over
whom rule is exercised. The utilitarian argument for political
democracy—that those affected should not only be benefited by
governmental decisions, but should also participate in making
them—follows from either or both of two additional points. It
may be claimed that each individual is the sole, or best, judge
of his own interests, which he defends and promotes with his
vote in the democratic process. Or, it may be denied that any
ruler or group of rulers other than the people (those affected)
as a whole can be depended upon to be motivated by the utili-
tarian principle: democratic decision-making is the procedure
most likely to lead to utilitarian results even in the absence of
benevolent motives in individuals. Utilitarianism suitably devel-
oped thus may yield the all-affected principle for collective de-
cision-making, and appeal may be made to it in support of this
variety of democratic theory.

  While resort is occasionally had to the all-affected principle
for democratic decision-making in small groups, where it is ob-
vious to all concerned with respect to a given issue just who *is*
likely to be affected by the outcome, this principle has not been
and cannot be implemented in the context of the state, to which
democratic theory is normally applied. Public decisions, author-
itative and binding as they are, are made (when they are made
democratically) not by those affected, but rather by all the eli-
gible voters or citizens (or their representatives) in the previ-
ously delimited political unit on whose agenda the question has
arisen. Political democracy is in practice associated with states,
that is, authoritative institutions that claim jurisdiction over, and,
if democratic, are responsive to the collective preferences of the
people residing in, geographically bounded territories. And
while all of these fellow-citizens may share some common con-
cerns, it is not likely to be the case that all issues arising on the
public agenda are matters of common concern, nor are all citi-
zens likely to be affected by every decision. Consideration of
the reasons for the usual resort to the territorial principle rather

than the all-affected principle reveals the fundamental unten-ability of the latter, despite its superficial attractiveness.

An obvious practical difficulty with the all-affected principle is that it would require a different constituency of voters or participants for every decision: the status of fellow-citizens would not be permanent, as is the case in the territorial states with which we ordinarily associate the concept of citizenship, but would shift in relation to the issue proposed. This is more than a mere inconvenience, which a committed democrat might be willing to tolerate. The deeper problem is that before a demo-cratic decision could be made on a particular issue (by those affected), a prior decision would have to be made, in each case, as to *who* is affected and therefore entitled to vote on the sub-stantive issue—a decision, that is, on the proper bounds of the relevant constituency. And how is this decision, which will be determinative of the ensuing substantive decision, to be made? It too should presumably be made democratically—that is, by those affected—but now we encounter a regression from which no procedural escape is possible.[11] In many cases of political decision-making, moreover, the question of who is affected by a given law or policy depends on *which* law or policy is enacted from among the available alternatives; in fact, the scope and nature of the impact of different laws or policies on different categories of people is often their most controversial feature. Thus to say that those who will be affected by a given decision are the ones who should participate in making it is to attempt to bypass the crucial question, and to propose what is a logical as well as a procedural impossibility.[12]

III. TERRITORIAL STATES

Given the failure of the all-affected principle, democratic theory is normally advanced with reference to some established community of people, all of whom are citizens and thus entitled to participate in public business and to make, through majority rule, collective decisions, regardless of their diverse personal interests or differential stakes in the issues that appear on the public agenda. Some citizens may indeed choose to defer, on particular issues, to those who seem to be especially affected,

but they are not required by democratic principles to do so. The same effect may be attained when those who are unaffected by or have only weak preferences with respect to proposed alternatives fail to exercise their right to vote, or conversely when comparatively intense minorities achieve disproportionate influence through their activism in the political process. In these cases political decision-making, as practiced in countries generally regarded as democratic, may sometimes seem to approximate what is called for by the all-affected principle. Despite the broad and undifferentiated category of legal citizenship, with its territorial basis, the effective constituencies for particular decisions consist of self-selected groups of individuals with special interests in the matter at hand; the boundaries of effective citizenship fluctuate. Familiar criticisms of pluralistic politics, however, call into question the assumption that all those who are affected by a policy normally succeed in exercising influence by informal processes. These phenomena thus seem anomalous, and sometimes even illicit, in light of democratic theory, although they may nevertheless be defended pragmatically.

A democratic political system is therefore one in which all the citizens of a particular community enjoy the right to have their preferences taken into account in public decisions, even though they may be differentially affected by the outcome. Worries that this might lead to unfair results may to some extent be alleviated by the reflection that *liberal* democratic theory, at any rate, not only calls for collective self-determination, but also insists that authority be exercised in accordance with other norms as well. One of these is the rule of law, and in particular the requirement that everyone enjoy the equal protection of, or equal treatment under, the laws that are made by the democratic process. If laws and policies literally treated everyone equally, of course, the all-affected principle would be satisfied even when democracy is implemented, in the usual way, within a fixed territorial community: the democratic regime would simply have to confine itself to matters that affect all of its members, and equally so at that. In practice democracies do not adhere to such limited agendas, and the "equal treatment" provision is usually taken to require only equal treatment for persons who are similarly situated, or who share similar, rele-

vant characteristics. Subject to this condition democracies do enact policies that impose special burdens, or distribute special benefits, to distinct categories of persons, and in normal practice it is the entire citizenry who are entitled to vote on such policies, and to determine the appropriate categories of persons to whom special treatment is given. The determination of relevant differences, which justify departures from absolute generality in law, is in fact one of the fundamental types of political decisions that a community must make, one that reflects its basic collective values and goals as a community. It is thus a decision that must be made (according to democratic theory) democratically, with equal opportunity to participate for all members of the community, even if the effect of such a decision is to identify and prescribe policies for special groups. Thus for example it is the whole citizenry who decide that eighteen-year-old men (and not everyone, nor other descriptions of persons) shall register for military service, and not the affected group—partly because states are organized territorially, and partly for the logical reason, mentioned above, that we cannot know who the especially affected *are* in advance of the larger community's decision. The requirement of the rule of law, with which such decisions as this are generally held to be compatible, does not therefore go very far in reconciling the all-affected principle with the usual structure of democracy.

Democracy therefore is practiced within communities all of whose members may vote and otherwise participate equally. According to what principle, then, or by what decision-making procedure, are the boundaries of the community determined, given that the all-affected principle is not workable for this purpose? The question of boundaries is essentially the question of defining eligibility for membership in the community: democracy refers to self-government by a people, and so *a people* or political "self" must be bounded or set apart from other peoples.[13] In the case of states, however, the boundary problem refers in practice to the geographical borders of the territory over which authority is to be exercised; although in democratic theory territory is a consideration secondary to that of the composition of the people, in modern states it comes for the most part to the same thing, since the principal conditions of citizenship are birth or a period of residence within a certain territory.

How then are the boundaries determined within which democ-
racy is practiced?

In democratic theory democracy is usually offered as the ex-
clusively legitimate method of making binding decisions for a
collectivity, yet brief reflection suffices to show that the bound-
ary problem is one matter of collective decision that cannot be
decided democratically. Just as in trying to implement the all-
affected principle we would need to make a prior decision re-
garding who is affected, so in attempting to solve the problem
of territorial boundaries we would need to make a prior deci-
sion regarding who are entitled to participate in arriving at a
solution—and this prior question is frequently just as contro-
versial as the substantive question, and procedurally insoluble.
A boundary has two sides, and the inclusion of some means the
exclusion of others, all of whom are, by this fact, affected by its
existence. Thus a boundary cannot be democratically estab-
lished solely by the collective will of those who are to be in-
cluded within it, even if we could identify them, although this
group is to be self-governing in other respects. When the mem-
bership of two adjacent groups is well-established, they can per-
haps negotiate their common geographical boundary; but when
boundaries in the larger sense of the composition of the self-
governing units are in dispute, no democratic procedure seems
applicable. Democracy can be practiced for making collective
decisions once the collectivity has been defined, but democratic
methods themselves are inadequate to establish the bounds of
the collectivity, whose existence democratic theory simply pre-
supposes.

This is more than a minor shortcoming of democratic theory,
and the logically prior boundary question is often controversial
for good reason. Not only are boundaries often an issue about
which disputes arise, and with regard to which individuals have
preferences; the resolution of this matter is also frequently de-
terminative of the substantive questions that follow, since the
alternative possible decisions respecting boundaries or mem-
bership may (predictably) generate majorities on different sides
of the substantive questions. This case is similar to what may be
observed at party conventions and similar proceedings, where
the fiercest contests are over rules, procedures, agendas, and
the like, since decisions made at this stage can be seen to influ-

ence if not predetermine the ostensibly democratic decisions of
the plenary sessions. The boundary problem seems more in-
tractable than the problem of alternative procedures or agen-
das, however, since at least in the latter case the group whose
business is to be conducted is definitively constituted. When
there is disagreement over the composition of the relevant de-
cision-making body, however—a sub-group demands decision-
making autonomy for itself, for example, or people outside the
group as currently constituted claim that they are entitled to be
included—an impasse occurs, and an outcome that some will
denounce as undemocratic will be the likely result.

The boundary problem and its insolubility by democratic
means may be vividly illustrated by the case of Ireland, where
the most troublesome political issue has long been precisely the
proper boundaries of autonomous communities. Other impor-
tant political questions, both in the north and south of the
country, would no doubt be decided differently than they have
been as a consequence of a different drawing of political
boundaries, which are controversial at least in part because their
definition can be seen by all to be determinative of other issues.
In the eyes of an old-fashioned Unionist the appropriate sov-
ereign unit (for historical, strategic, and economic reasons) was
the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the entity
that existed from 1800 until 1922. A plebiscite taken among
the population of this entity during that period would no doubt
have revealed a substantial majority in favor of the established
boundaries, a fact reflected in the refusal of the U.K. Parlia-
ment to acquiesce in demands for Irish independence. In the
eyes of an Irish nationalist, however, the proper unit is the is-
land of Ireland, which seems—both geographically, and for a
different set of historical reasons—to be an entity distinct from
Great Britain. A vote among the inhabitants of Ireland would
probably confirm this opinion. Instead, in order to appease a
local majority of Irish Unionists, the boundary settlement of
1921–22 embodied a third possibility: Ireland was divided into
what became the present Republic of Ireland and a new entity
called Northern Ireland, which remained associated, by a vote
of its people, with Great Britain in a new state called the United
Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. A vote taken
among the inhabitants of Northern Ireland would confirm this

status quo, as would, presumably, a vote among the inhabitants
of the present United Kingdom; yet the impasse remains, since
the present boundaries appear arbitrary and illegitimate (a kind
of international gerrymandering) to Irish nationalists. It may
be conceded that all parties to this dispute are *bona fide* demo-
crats, inasmuch as all of them are prepared to rest their case
with a popular vote; what they adamantly differ about is the
appropriate boundaries within which the vote should be taken.
Democratic theory offers no guidelines on this question, and so
the essence of the Irish problem is that no solution could gen-
erally be accepted as legitimate, given the prevailing contem-
porary acceptance of democracy as the exclusively legitimate
method for resolving political questions. It is for this reason
that all parties to the dispute, democrats though they may be,
are found appealing additionally to non-democratic principles
(historical tradition, nationality, economic rationality, and so on),
none of which carries decisive weight, to support the case for
their preferred boundaries.

IV. CONSENT

Is there any way, in specialized types of democratic theory or
through congenial principles, to resolve such conflicts? In this
and the following sections I consider the boundary problem as
it appears in consent theory and the theory of nationalism, both
of which have historically been associated with modern demo-
cratic theory; I also consider some geographical approaches to
boundaries, and some theories that make reference to system
autonomy as a desirable feature of political regimes, including
democratic ones. None of these, I shall argue, offers a gener-
ally satisfactory solution to the problem.

Modern democratic theory is an outgrowth of a longer tra-
dition of political thought that focuses on consent as the req-
uisite foundation of government. Consent theory characteristi-
cally takes political and legal obligation as the central issue of
political theory, and it asserts that (at least in the public realm)
only an individual's consent, as expressed for example in an
agreement or promise—that is, a free act of his will—can create
a valid obligation for him. It follows that governmental author-

ity is legitimate, and subjects are obligated to obey it, only if they have consented to its existence in some fashion. The requirement of consent, which was at first applied to the original establishment and form of the state, was gradually extended until, in the democratic version of consent theory, it is conceived as the mainspring of government. Consent means deliberate choice by the people among alternatives on an ongoing and regular basis; every law and policy is supposed to reflect the will of the majority expressed through the democratic process, while the participation of all the citizens reflects their general consent to the procedural norms of democracy and the constitution of the state in which these are embodied.

Does democratic consent theory offer any guidance on the problem of political boundaries? The original establishment of political authority among previously unattached individuals was the problem typically posed by the classical consent (or contract) theorists, and so one might have expected them to confront the question of how determinate communities come to be set off from one another in the boundary-less state of nature. This question tends to be avoided, however, although they generally appear to hold that any group of consenting individuals can become a people, their unity deriving entirely from their agreement and the laws that are made in consequence of it.[14] Instead these theorists (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant), like most modern democratic theorists, begin by presupposing the existence of a community, in the sense of a collection of individuals residing in a delimited territory, and they concentrate on the questions of how these persons could agree among themselves to establish authority, and what form it would take. The proper method of determining appropriate boundaries is left undiscussed.

Consent theory does, however, suggest a principle that seems consonant with the underlying values of democratic theory: the appropriate group within which democracy is to be practiced, and over the members of which collective decisions are to be binding, should be a group that each individual member has joined, or to whose authority he has consented. This principle conjures up the picture of a voluntary association, reminding us that democracy may be adopted as the mode of governance of such associations, of many and varied purposes. Modern po-

litical democracy has even been said to have its roots in the congregational self-government of certain Protestant churches, membership in which was entirely optional and, indeed, supposed to be a matter of self-conscious choice.[15] For voluntary associations, consent theory does appear to indicate a plausible and feasible method of determining the bounds of the democratic community. Boundaries in such cases are open and fluid, at least in the sense that dissatisfied members are always free to leave, and also in the sense that, normally, new members may be admitted, if they are attracted to the group's purposes, and subject to its rules, but only on a voluntary basis.

Significant difficulties arise, however, when the attempt is made to assimilate states to this model. States are territorial and compulsory associations, claiming jurisdiction over all residents from the time of their birth or arrival within their borders; and these features seem to be necessary if states are to fulfill their minimal functions of apprehending criminals and exercising compulsory adjudication over disputes between individuals. Actual consent in the sense of a deliberate decision to adhere to a polity is the infrequent exception, characterizing mainly naturalized citizens. Emigration, moreover, is a costly and unfeasible option for most people, even when states permit it, as Hume pointed out.[16] Citizens may learn to approve of the governmental institutions of their country, and they may, if it is a democratic government, have the opportunity of consenting to, or seeking to change, its laws; but the boundaries within which these processes take place are something they normally find settled—or, if unsettled, not a matter to which the principle of consent is readily applicable.

The consent principle may work, to a limited degree, in establishing the composition of groups enjoying local self-government within a federal state. The formal boundaries of the subnational units are of course usually territorial, like those of the larger state, and the same problems of arbitrariness, non-democratic origins, and even manipulation (gerrymandering) arise at this level. Federalism also presents democratic theory with the additional problem of deciding on the appropriate level within the federal structure for making a particular decision— a prior decision that is frequently controversial because, like the drawing of political boundaries, it may predetermine the

"democratic" outcomes on substantive issues.[17] If one can as-
sume geographical mobility within a federal system, however,
one may imagine individuals "voting with their feet," migrating
and settling where they like, thus becoming citizens (at the local
level) of a community they choose for themselves. The possibil-
ity of migration does not of course alter the established terri-
torial boundaries, but it may (in principle) determine the more
important question of the composition of communities in a way
that seems consistent with democratic theory.

The assumption of perfect mobility is unrealistic even for a
country like the United States; it is of course even more so in-
ternationally, which is what most seriously undermines the por-
trayal of the establishment of states on a voluntaristic basis in
classical contract theories. An individual may be fortunate
enough to find that democratic institutions exist within the
boundaries of the country in which he was born, or he can
work for their realization there, but the boundaries themselves
are normally given. The background assumption of Madison's
advice (in *Federalist* #10) to choose a large republic over a num-
ber of small ones was that the Americans of 1788 had such a
choice before them, but this is a rare occurrence in political life.
Boundaries are not only usually given, but their origins more
often than not do not bear scrutiny in light of democratic and
related types of political theory.[18] As Hume says in the essay
cited above, consent when present is no doubt a ground of le-
gitimate government, but consent historically grows within states
founded by other means (usually force), as a consequence of
good government. Consent may even come to be routinized in
democratic institutions within the state, but it cannot normally
be the basis of the existence or of the boundaries of the state
in the first place.

The issue of secession may also be mentioned in connection
with consent theory. If it is held to be a principle of democratic
theory that membership in a particular self-governing unit
ought to be contingent on the consent of each individual, it
clearly follows that, barring special circumstances, a right of
emigration ought to exist for individuals.[19] More controver-
sially, however, it might also appear that a territorially concen-
trated group whose members (or a majority of them) are dis-
affected with the larger community ought to be entitled to

secede, along with their territory, and to constitute themselves
as a new state. Compelling them to remain within the larger
state may be compatible with democracy understood solely as
majoritarianism (since they are a minority of the whole), but it
seems at variance with the principle of consent as the basis for
determining membership or the boundaries of the polity.

The right of secession is nonetheless not recognized by mod-
ern democratic states, although it sometimes is successfully as-
serted by arms and afterwards accepted. The other side of this
question was maintained in familiar words by Abraham Lin-
coln, who combined the roles of state-builder and democratic
theorist. The Union must be preserved, he says, precisely in
order to assure the success of the American experiment in de-
mocracy; secession is incompatible with democracy because it
denies the principle of majority rule, and perhaps also because
of its tendency, if not checked, to anarchy. Still, to accept the
verdict of the majority of the larger union, rather than that of
the majority in a smaller but viable geographical unit, is arbi-
trary in terms of democratic theory, and no doubt reflects a
view of the desirability of large and strong states based on other
than democratic grounds. Nor does it tell us how large the larger
union ought optimally to be: the United States had, after all,
seceded from the British Empire. It is superior force, not ad-
herence to principles of democracy or consent, that generally
resolves such disputes, as in the United States itself.[20]

V. NATIONALITY

Democratic political movements in the past century and a half
have frequently been associated with nationalism, and much
modern democratic theory has acquiesced in what appears to
be the verdict of history by accepting this additional principle
as offering the best practical solution to the problem of political
boundaries for sovereign states. Nationalism, however, contains
difficulties of its own, and a boundary principle based on na-
tionality does not always fit well with democratic theory.

The nationalist principle holds that states ought to corre-
spond to pre-existing national units, and that the claim of in-
dependent statehood and self-government arises from the col-

lective right of a distinct nation to determine its own affairs and
destiny. While states are artificial creations of political will, na-
tions (it is said) are given, either by nature, or by history, which
has differentiated nations from one another on the basis of dis-
tinctive languages, cultures, traditions, and common memories.
No single objective criterion of nationality appears to be defin-
itive, and defenders of the principle usually end by saying that
a nation is simply a group of people united by their common
feeling of being a single body in some respect(s) other than
their being under a common government.[21] The nation then is
held to comprise the *people* or community presupposed by dem-
ocratic theory, and when a particular nation moveover occupies
(or has a historical claim to) a definite territory as well, the cri-
terion of nationality seems to provide a solution to the bound-
ary problem in both of its forms.

Democratic nationalists hold not only that the nation-state is
the appropriate unit of self-government, but further that all
members of the nation are by that fact qualified to be citizens,
with an equal right to participate in managing their common
affairs. This conjunction of nationalism and democracy seems
largely fortuitous, attributable to the historical fact that demo-
cratic ideology discredited dynastic and in some cases colonial
boundaries together with dynastic and colonial rule, leaving a
void with respect to the legitimate foundation of modern states
that nationalism filled.[22] The nationalist principle is neverthe-
less fundamentally different from democratic principles, since
its central tenet appeals to non-voluntaristic criteria.

John Stuart Mill's qualified acceptance of political claims based
on nationality illustrates the effort of liberal democratic theo-
rists to reconcile themselves to the currents of the times. "Where
the sentiment of nationality exists in any force," Mill says, "there
is a *prima facie* case for uniting all the members of the nation-
ality under the same government. . . . This is merely saying
that the question of government ought to be decided by the
governed."[23] This effort to construe nationalism as somehow
implied by democratic theory, however, is circular: one must
have decided in advance that "the governed" should be the na-
tion, in order to conclude that they would (democratically)
choose to be an independent nation-state. Retreating from this
high ground, Mill also offers several arguments to the effect

that nationality (as a distinct principle) may be expected to con-
tribute to the success of democratic government: a common na-
tionality facilitates the communications, confidence, and mutual
respect that are necessary or desirable in a democracy, permit-
ting compromise and the pursuit of the public interest; it en-
sures sympathy between the army and the people, thus pre-
cluding a common tactic of despotic governments. Nationality
as a "sense of belonging together" and as a foundation for the
requisite sense of equality thus may be among the conditions
favorable to successful democracy.[24]

   These arguments notwithstanding, however, nationality pro-
vides only a *prima facie* case for statehood. Mill's more funda-
mental utilitarian principles lead him to the important qualifi-
cation that it is desirable for small and backward peoples to be
absorbed into more highly civilized states—as for example the
Scottish Highlanders and the Welsh have been merged with
England, the Bretons and the Basques of Navarre with France.
It is better, he says, for the average Welshman or Breton to
enjoy membership in a more advanced community—rather than
"to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times"—
and it is also in the general interest of the progress of civiliza-
tion as a whole, which often emerges as the decisive considera-
tion in Mill's moral theory.[25] This reasoning suggests a differ-
ent principle for the boundaries of political communities: they
should be drawn so as most efficiently to spread the influence
of higher civilizations, by absorbing less advanced groups as mi-
nority elements into larger democratic states, where their mem-
bers may be elevated to the higher level. This is a perfectly
coherent principle, although it is no more conceptually related
to democracy than is the alternative nationalist principle. It is
also no doubt of fairly limited applicability, and in default of it
Mill is prepared, like most nineteenth-century liberals, to em-
brace nationalism.

   The union of democratic and nationalist principles remains
prominent in world politics today, the United Nations having
affirmed both the "right of self-determination" of "peoples" and
equal democratic political rights for individuals.[26] Political
boundaries should be drawn, on these principles, in accordance
with the geographical distribution of distinct peoples or na-
tions, the members of which are entitled—and required—to

practice democracy among themselves. The existence of "peo-
ples" is presupposed, as in nationalist theory generally, al-
though the concept is no better defined; thus groups aspiring
to self-government continue to seek legitimacy by trying to es-
tablish their claim to be genuine peoples.

The nationalist principle is theoretically clear, although its
empirical applicability to disputed cases is doubtful. Before
considering the difficulties, however, we should note how it
qualifies democratic theory. Democracy refers to a method of
making collective decisions which, holding as it does that collec-
tive preferences or majority will (suitably informed by deliber-
ation) should prevail, appeals to values such as voluntarism,
freedom (from an alien will, or from mere tradition), and
rationality. When it is combined with nationalism, however, de-
mocracy appears to be a subordinate and circumscribed prin-
ciple, even if decisive in its intra-national sphere. Democratic
rule is exercised, but within a context that is not itself freely
chosen, nor reflective of the will or the reason of the people
concerned. Democratic politics takes place in a framework that
is held to be outside the scope of political choice, and identified
in accordance with criteria supplied by a theory other than
democratic theory. Thus while as a matter of putative practical
necessity democratic theorists may subscribe to the claims made
on behalf of nationality, it should be recognized that in so
doing they acknowledge the limitations of democracy.

Beyond this, however, several major difficulties with the na-
tionalistic principle severely weaken its acceptability as a gen-
eral solution to the boundary problem of democratic theory.
The first of these concerns the large number of actual cases
(frequently the subject of controversy) where one or another of
the tenets of nationalist theory does not in fact hold true, and
where therefore the principle offers no guidance. There may
in a given region be no agreed-upon nation or people, but
rather some other state of affairs: a politically united but het-
erogeneous population (the United States), or a population
sharing a common language and culture but lacking the com-
mon interest or sense of unity requisite for a nation (Ireland
and Britain, the U.S. in 1860), or two or more different nations
whose people are apparently content to live associated in a
larger, multi-national state (United Kingdom, Soviet Union), or

a number of ethnic groups, each below the size to which the
principle of self-determination is conventionally held to apply
(some African countries). These examples reveal the inade-
quacy of nationality as the exclusive determinant of acceptable
boundaries, and they point to the fact that political choice and
creativity can be brought to bear on the problem, sometimes in
a benign and stable fashion.

Another sort of empirical difficulty arises when a claim of
nationhood is advanced but not accepted by other groups whose
established boundaries would be affected (Basques, Kurds, Pal-
estinians). Such a claim may be rejected either because of doubts
about its procedural validity, that is, whether those who make
it really represent those in whose name they purport to speak;
or it may be problematic simply because the theory of nation-
alism lacks precise and universally valid criteria for identifying
a genuine nation. In such cases neither nationalist nor demo-
cratic theory offers any acceptable method for resolving the
question.

A final type of difficulty presents itself when two or more
nations, with clearly distinct collective identities, exist, but their
members are intermingled in the same territory. Since inde-
pendent states require mutually exclusive and reasonably con-
tinuous territories, the nationalist principle cannot be applied
in such cases except through a transfer of populations—some-
thing that usually cannot be accomplished except forcibly. Even
when it is done, the determination of the boundaries into which
the populations are moved cannot be made in accordance with
the principles of nationalism (nor of democracy), but only
through some other method, such as war, or negotiated com-
promise. It is well known how this difficulty emerged in the
Versailles settlement, when the victorious Allies set out to apply
the principle of national self-determination (which they associ-
ated with democracy) to the peoples of the defeated empires.
The residential intermixture of peoples in central Europe was
such that it proved impossible to draw boundaries so that each
nation had its own state, and each state contained only one na-
tionality.[27] While democracy was to be practiced within the new
states, the founding decisions could not be made democrati-
cally, but were imposed from without; resentments arising from
these decisions—which involved the denial of some national

claims, and the creation of new national minorities—were an important factor in the outbreak and course of the Second World War.[28]

A device that has been used on occasion to settle national boundaries in an apparently democratic fashion is the plebiscite, in which a group of people are permitted to decide for themselves, by majority vote, of what country they wish to become a part, or in some cases whether they wish to form an independent state. The plebiscitary process is necessarily so constrained by extraneous forces and arbitrariness, however, that its consonance with the democratic principle (decision in accordance with the will of the people) is illusory. An outside authority must set the alternatives and delimit the electorate, decisions that will appear unfair to some interested parties, especially as they will predetermine the outcome of the vote (and may even be framed for this purpose).[29] A plebiscite is a plausibly legitimate method for settling the independence or affiliation of an area whose national identity and geographical boundaries are already firmly settled by history and not in dispute (as is arguable, for example, in the case of Quebec); but when it is boundaries themselves that are in question, a plebiscite can provide only the appearance of democracy and is likely in consequence to stimulate cynicism about democratic government generally.

I turn now from difficulties in application to another problem in the theory of nationalism, one that casts doubt on its claim to be anything other than an acquiescence in the verdicts of history, so far as the territorial foundations of states are concerned. Contrary to the claim in nationalist theory that nations exist independently of, and prior to, states, thus predetermining their proper boundaries, a careful reading of history suggests otherwise. Nations are more often than not created by states, by the deliberate policies of rulers of states in the process of their establishment and consolidation, or otherwise by the endeavors of political activists who seek to realize the nation-state ideal. Thus attempts have been made to develop national foundations for aspirant states by reviving or standardizing declining languages (Irish, Ukrainian) and by other cultural efforts; in the "new nations" there are many cases of newly invented national identities being promoted by political leaders

and superimposed on the ethnic pluralism that exists within the established boundaries (India, Algeria, Ghana, etc.)[30] Macpherson, who acknowledges that the creation of national loyalties in underdeveloped countries is usually undertaken by one-party authoritarian regimes, nevertheless regards this process as "democratic;"[31] but it is not, in the senses of democracy admitted in this paper. Nor is such nation-making a feature only of the contemporary third world: the national unity of apparently clearly defined states such as Britain and France is actually the product of similar efforts by successful state-builders in the past.[32] Thus the boundaries and common culture of the units that may be destined to become self-governing states is rarely natural or simply given, as nationalists hold, but rather is determined by political will. This will, however, is not and cannot be a democratic will, but that of rulers and activists; it is made effectual more often by their initiatives and by force than by any consultation of the preferences of the people concerned.

VI. GEOGRAPHY AND SALIENCE

Geographers have naturally been interested in political boundaries—their origins, consequences, and relationships to other features of the human geography of an area; several topics from this literature may be briefly considered. Geographers have called attention to the fact that precise, linear boundaries for political units, as a concept and a practice, are in large part distinctive of the modern West, and may be contrasted with the more fluid and indeterminate zones or frontiers that characterized Medieval Europe and some non-Western cultures.[33] Well-defined territorial boundaries are probably to be associated with the emergence of the modern sovereign state of the Western type, with its claim to a monopoly of coercive authority within an area (and possibly also with the concept of private property as exclusive *dominium* in European civil law).[34] This type of state, in any case, and this conception of state boundaries, have become universal norms, and thus it is primarily boundaries in this sense that pose the main practical problem for democratic theory.

The literature of political geography contains several nor-

mative suggestions regarding boundaries, though not especially ones that are advanced with concern for their conformity to democratic principles. The idea that the best boundaries are defensible ones is frequently proposed, and it is morally plausible if such boundaries would serve to decrease the likelihood of armed conflict between states. Three difficulties, however, attend this suggestion. The defensibility of borders varies to an extent with changes in military technology and thus does not offer a secure basis for boundaries over time. One country's strong borders, moreover, are frequently its neighbor's weak ones; defensible boundaries, however, would be mutually acceptable, and thus stable, only if they were equally defensible from both sides. There is no agreement, finally, on whether the goal of peace is more effectively advanced by boundaries that act as barriers between peoples, or by those that facilitate intercourse and hence mutual understanding. It thus appears that strategic considerations, while they may often (and perhaps properly) enter into boundary determinations, do not provide clear or generally applicable criteria. Geographers have also explored the relationship between boundaries and patterns of economic activity, a topic that suggests that desirable (in the sense of efficient) boundaries would be those that embrace regions that function as economic units. Economic patterns more often than not develop, however, in response to political boundaries previously established. More importantly, it would seem that facilitation of economic growth could never be a neutral or non-controversial principle for boundaries, since any alternative in this respect would tend to advance some interests at the expense of others. Thus while strategic and economic principles may occasionally offer useful considerations, neither very often provides generally acceptable criteria.[35] Neither, furthermore, is democratic, except insofar as one can assume that military security or economic rationality is everyone's (or the majority's) paramount interest, and impute preferences accordingly.

The most-discussed geographical issue pertains to the claim that "natural boundaries" ought to delimit the territory of states, a claim that has at times had an important impact on political practice. The natural-boundary principle, moreover, can be adduced as an adjunct of democratic theory by being brought un-

der the more general heading of salience. Salient factors may
be the basis of democratic choice, first, insofar as they deter-
mine the popular preferences that democracy must take into
account. Secondly, resort to salient features of the objects among
which a choice is to be made, merely because they are salient,
can be defended in general as a rational basis for a collective
decision in some circumstances. When it is important to every-
one that a decision be made, but when it is a matter of compar-
ative indifference to each party *which* alternative is chosen, sal-
ience provides a criterion that facilitates both agreement itself
and observance of the agreed-upon rule or convention there-
after.[36] Accepting the model of rational choice from which this
conclusion emerges, a democrat might accept salience to settle
disputes when, as in the case of boundaries, democratic proce-
dures are unworkable. This reasoning may partly explain the
attractiveness of the notion of natural boundaries, in the sense
of conspicuous features of the physical terrain, as the basis for
political boundaries.[37]

   The first difficulty with this suggestion is of course that in
many instances there simply are no obvious physical indicators
for boundaries where, on other grounds, boundaries seem to
be needed. A more serious, and usually decisive, objection,
however, calls into question the very concept of salience or
"naturalness" as an objective quality of geographical features.
It is clear, to take the most famous case, that the alleged natu-
ralness of the Rhine-Alps-Pyrenees frontiers for France was a
distinctively French (not German or Italian) perception. Pre-
scriptions and actions based on this claim were therefore man-
ifestations of a particular political will, notwithstanding appeals
to "nature" and inevitability; while this claim was advanced most
vociferously to justify annexations of territory in the wake of
the French Revolution, the anti-dynastic ideology of natural
frontiers was evidently a product of the nationalistic rather than
the democratic element in the Revolution.[38] French expansion-
ism led Fichte to reply that the "truly natural boundaries" of a
nation are "internal," spiritual ones, marked externally by a
common language—that is, to appeal from physical to what
might be termed cultural salience, which is even less likely to
offer grounds for consensual agreement.[39] The objective qual-
ity of geographically salient features may be questioned more

generally. Rivers have cartographic salience and have therefore sometimes been used by boundary-drawers, but in actuality rivers in inhabited regions more often unite than separate the people who live on the two banks. The case of Ireland casts doubt on the naturalness (to all observers) of islands as political units. That mountains form obvious dividers, it has been said, is the distinctive perception of lowlanders.[40]

Salience may be a suitable basis for collective choice when a given thing is equally salient—and salient as a solution to the same problem—to all concerned. Boundaries established on this basis, therefore, if they are to accord with democratic values, must be equally salient, *as* proper boundaries, to the people living on both sides. The salience of physical features as political boundaries, however, is likely to differ among the disputing parties depending on their particular historical associations and political ambitions. Salience, furthermore, figures in theories of rational choice as a means of selecting among comparatively indifferent alternatives, and thus it will not work when, as is often the case with boundaries, the alternatives are the objects of differing and intense preferences. For both of these reasons, then, attempted resort to "natural" boundaries comprises a mistaken and usually futile effort to deny the essentially *political* (and thus artificial) quality of boundaries and the political nature of their determination. In some cases political boundaries may be drawn so as to conform to conspicuous features of the terrain, in which case salience, in addition to custom, no doubt plays a role in sustaining them. But it is unlikely that appeal to salience could resolve a political dispute over proper boundaries.

VII. AUTONOMY

The concept of autonomy may finally be considered for whatever guidance it may offer on the question of appropriate boundaries for a democratic system. Autonomy denotes both self-governance from within and independence from external control, ideas that may be combined with democratic procedures for decision-making in order to capture more completely what is usually meant by a democratic system. Two suggestions

may be made regarding the bearing of autonomy on appro-
priate boundaries—neither of them, however, comprising a so-
lution to the problem.

Democratic theorists have frequently raised the question
whether it is desirable, in general, for a democratic community
to be large or small. The latter has often appeared to be desir-
able from the point of view of realizing such democratic values
as equality, fraternity, and participation. Dahl and Tufte pose
this question more systematically as involving a trade-off be-
tween "citizen effectiveness" (a sense of real involvement in de-
cision-making), which is attainable only in comparatively small
units, and "system capacity," which requires large ones.[41] Sys-
tem capacity refers to the democratic system's control over a
significant agenda, or its ability to act effectively on all the mat-
ters that affect the interests of its members, and it is thus re-
lated to the concept of autonomy: a unit that is too small, how-
ever democratic it may be internally, will inevitably have some
of the decisions on matters that affect it made by outsiders—or
not made at all—and in either case its impotence renders it
something less than a fully self-governing or autonomous de-
mocracy. The requirement of autonomy thus implies generally
that democracies ought to be larger rather than smaller; more
precisely it suggests that boundaries ought to be drawn such
that each unit has the capacity to control all the matters that
affect it. This principle, however, is unworkable: the "matters"
for political decision are not always congruent with stable ter-
ritorial boundaries; more seriously, "affectedness" is a contro-
versial matter itself, invocation of which raises the difficulties
discussed above in connection with the all-affected principle.
Dahl and Tufte suggest that democratic theorists should think
in terms of a hierarchy of different sizes and levels of govern-
ment, in which the different goals and values of democracy
could be realized in differing degrees at different levels; but
this in itself does not offer a solution to the problem of how
the various units ought to be bounded.

Deutsch relates the concept of the autonomy of a system to a
"communication differential" between it and its environment:
"among members or parts of an organization there should be
more rapid and effective communication than with out-
siders."[42] Deutsch mostly argues descriptively that self-govern-

ing organizations *are* marked by such differentials, which can be observed and measured, but the argument can take a prescriptive form: boundaries of political systems should be drawn in accordance with such differentials, thereby enabling the system to derive maximum benefit from a common set of historical memories, an unambiguous symbolic system, and facility of internal communications. This argument can, moreover, be applied with special force to democratic systems, since ease of communication is conducive to the deliberative process and the sense of common purpose that are especially important in democracies.

Deutsch's suggestion accords with one of the common arguments relating nationality to democratic government: national sentiments, where they exist, facilitate communication within the national group, thereby conducing to the operation of democracy. It is also reminiscent of Dewey's idea of a "public" as constituted by common perceptions of the consequences of collective actions, and thus by a conscious common interest in controlling these consequences, which is the function of the state. The proper scope of a state, Dewey suggests, corresponds to the extent of such shared perceptions, which no doubt can be related to concentration of communications.[43]

Something resembling this proposal may occasionally provide grounds for drawing boundaries, but its general applicability may be doubted. One difficulty is that communication differentials, and shared perceptions, like the incidence of national sentiments, are usually a *consequence* of political boundaries previously drawn and maintained for a period of time. National boundaries especially, once drawn, however arbitrarily, become important factors in determining subsequent patterns not only of economic and communications networks, but of people's habits and outlooks as well.[44] Another difficulty is that this criterion may conflict with that of autonomy in the sense of system capacity: it may be that pressing matters in need of political solution may be larger in scope than present concentrations of communications, which are related to the past experience of groups, and may be outdated, and thus that optimal boundaries would be more inclusive than indicated by this criterion. While the idea of a communication differential thus provides insights into how political systems function, and into

the meaning of autonomy, it is not likely to offer a clear prin-
ciple for boundaries in many cases.

VIII. CONCLUSION

I shall conclude by reviewing the ways in which the issue of
boundaries may be said to constitute a problem for democratic
theory. First of all democratic theory cannot itself provide any
solution to disputes that may—and historically do—arise con-
cerning boundaries. This is generally the case with versions of
democratic theory, including those that emphasize participa-
tion, majority rule, consent, autonomy, and the all-affected
principle, and it is likewise often the case with the principle of
nationality that (though distinct) is often allied with democratic
theory. It may not be surprising that democracy, which is a
method for group decision-making or self-governance, cannot
be brought to bear on the logically prior matter of the consti-
tution of the group itself, the existence of which it presupposes.
Nevertheless, strong claims are frequently made for democ-
racy, both by its philosophical advocates and by ideologues and
activists of the modern world; democracy is commonly put for-
ward as the sole foundation of legitimate government, and as
the sole legitimate method for making binding public decisions
of all sorts. Thus that democratic methods cannot be brought
to bear on the determination of political boundaries, even
though this is usually an important political decision, about
which people may have strong preferences, has the effect of
rendering controversies over boundaries among the most in-
tractable and bitter types of political conflict. In default of dem-
ocratic theory, boundaries may occasionally be resolved in ac-
cordance with the principle of nationality, in which there is also
widespread concurrence, or on the basis of physical features of
the landscape. When these criteria also fail, like democracy, to
offer clear guidance, it appears that our only choices are to
abide by the arbitrary verdicts of history or war, or to appeal
on an *ad hoc* basis to other principles, none of which commands
general respect.

In addition to the fact that democratic procedures cannot ac-
commodate preferences regarding boundaries as such, there is

the secondary problem that the establishment of boundaries (undemocratic as this must be) generally predetermines the outcomes of substantive political issues. This is a matter that is conspicuous and therefore a source of overt controversy only when boundaries are in actual dispute, and a choice must somehow be made among various proposed alternatives; on these occasions the parties concerned can usually see that different resolutions of the boundaries will inevitably lead to different subsequent decisions and policies, and this can greatly enhance the bitterness of the conflict attending the boundary question. Boundaries *generally* determine substantive political outcomes, however, or at least significantly restrict the range of alternatives that will be considered and that have a realistic chance of being adopted—although this is not ordinarily recognized when boundaries are well-established and not themselves in dispute.[45] A literal application of the all-affected principle calls attention in a vivid way to the arbitrariness of virtually all established political boundaries. Doubts may therefore arise concerning the validity of democratic procedures when it is considered that, however impeccable democratic decision-making may be within a given community, the outcomes are in a sense determined by the previous and inescapably undemocratic decisions that defined the community in the first place.

Before democratic procedures can begin to operate, boundaries must be established in one fashion or another. Continuing dissatisfaction with the boundaries as given can, finally, threaten the viability of the established democracy. It is often said that a successful democracy in practice depends on a consensus among its citizens on fundamental democratic values (equality, respect for persons, the right to dissent, and so forth) and on the validity of democratic procedures themselves. Beyond this a healthy democracy must also be characterized by a fundamental consensus on the boundaries of the system, an absence of which among the citizens will be accompanied by a sense of unfairness and alienation if not active efforts to overthrow the system, together with a repudiation of its "democracy" as a fraud. Similarly, a belief among outsiders that the boundaries are illegitimate may pose an external threat to the viability of the system. Thus it must be a matter of concern to all democrats—both the citizens of an existing democratic system and well-wishers of

democracy in general—that boundaries of democratic communities be generally acknowledged as fair and appropriate. In arguing, as I have, that democracy itself has no resources for bringing about such a state of affairs, I intend no disparagement of democratic principles in their proper sphere. The boundary problem does, however, reveal one of the limits of the applicability of democracy, and acknowledgment of this may have the beneficial effect of moderating the sometimes excessive claims that are made in its name.[46]

NOTES

1. This is one of the few questions of democratic theory that is not systematically discussed in J. Roland Pennock, *Democratic Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
2. See for example Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Michael Margolis, *Viable Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), seeks ways of enhancing opportunities to participate. Equality of participation, or of access to decision-making, may be held to be required.
3. Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), chap. 2.
4. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.
5. Jack Lively, *Democracy* (New York: St. Martin's, 1975), pp. 11–13.
6. Consent may be construed as a weak democratic principle. Consent of the people to what the government proposes is different from the government's doing what the people want. A.D. Lindsay, *The Essentials of Democracy*, 2nd ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 29–30. See generally P.H. Partridge, *Consent and Consensus* (New York: Praeger, 1971).
7. As the preceding discussion shows, I take "collective preference" (in Braybrooke's terms) to comprise the essential meaning of democracy. If democracy is taken to mean a system that upholds personal rights, it may be that the boundary problem is less significant. It does not seem to me that welfare is conceptually related to democracy at all. See David Braybrooke, *Three Tests for Democracy: Personal Rights, Human Welfare, and Collective Preference* (New York: Random House, 1968). On welfare and the meaning of democracy, cf. Ernest Barker, *Reflections on Government* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 315.
8. "The boundary indicates certain well-established limits (the bounds)

of the given political unit, and all that which is within the boundary is bound together, that is, is fastened by an internal bond." Ladis K.D. Kristof, "The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries," in Harm J. de Blij, *Systematic Political Geography,* 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), p. 137.

9. This was Point II of Wilson's "Four Additional Points," July 4, 1918, quoted in Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York: Holt, 1936), p. 635.

10. Carl Cohen, *Democracy* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1970), p. 8: "In a perfect democracy all who are thus affected [by a decision] play some part." Robert A. Dahl, *After the Revolution? Authority in a Good Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 64: "Everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government." Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 74: ". . . the democratic principle that those who make decisions should be accountable to the people who are affected by them . . ." A.D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 231, calls the all-affected principle a revolutionary form of democratic theory.

11. Cohen, *Democracy,* p. 27, says with respect to this problem that determination should be made "upon the merits of particular cases;" but this begs the question: who decides what the merits are? Cf. also p. 16: "It is no reasonable requirement to make of any democracy that it enlarge its community to include all of those who may prove to be concerned in the sequel of any of its acts." Of course, after the fact it would be too late in any case; but on Cohen's all-affected principle it is not clear why this would not have been a reasonable requirement before the decision was made.

12. When a decision-making unit is constituted for very limited purposes, as in a water conservancy district, it may be technically feasible, and appropriate, to assign the power of decision to those (and only those) who are affected. This assumes, however, that there are no external effects of such decisions, and that those excluded from the unit have no claim whatever to be included—a situation that is no doubt rare.

13. Democracy is a *politeia,* in Aristotle's sense, defined primarily by the composition of its citizen body and by the conception of justice that determines the structure of authority within it. Territory is a secondary consideration in democratic theory, though not of course in the practice of modern states.

14. See Bernard Crick, *In Defense of Politics,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 80, for a defense of this view against nationalism.

15. Lindsay, *Essentials of Democracy,* pp. 20–21, 35–36, 48, 52–54. The democracy of such congregations is consensual, due to both their small size and the like-mindedness of the members—the latter a fact due to the voluntaristic basis of membership. For a discussion of similar themes, see Jane J. Mansbridge, "The Limits of Friendship," in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., *Nomos XVI: Participation in Politics* (New York: Lieber-Atherton, 1975), pp. 246–75.

16. David Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 462.

17. Sidgwick considers the thought that, humanity being a natural collectivity, the whole world is the natural unit for democratic government. Since such a government would have to be federal, with numerous subdivisions, however, significant controversies would continue regarding *internal* boundaries, as well as over the distribution of powers among the different levels. Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics,* 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 218.

18. Cf. Dahl, *After the Revolution?,* p. 62: "the philosophers take up where history leaves off." Dahl also acknowledges the boundary problem in *Preface to Democratic Theory,* pp. 52–54.

19. See Frederick G. Whelan, "Citizenship and the Right to Leave," *American Political Science Review* 75 (1981), pp. 636–53.

20. On secession see Sidgwick, *Elements of Politics,* pp. 226–27, 648–49; and Robert R. Bowie and Carl J. Friedrich, eds., *Studies in Federalism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1954), pp. 765–66. The amicable achievement of independence by a former colony may be seen as a kind of successful secession, but in such cases the colony was usually (in principle) regarded as a separate entity, destined for eventual self-government. New boundaries are not drawn; the bounded units rather by mutual consent acquire a new relationship.

21. Sidgwick, *Elements of Politics,* p. 224. National sentiments are, however, sometimes generated through a common identification with a past state, real or legendary (the German *Reich,* Zimbabwe); see Raymond D. Gastil, *Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1978* (New York: Freedom House, 1978), p. 183.

22. Cf. Christopher J. Berry, "Nations and Norms," *Review of Politics* 43 (1981), p. 85, who suggests a stronger connection.

23. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government,* with *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1910), pp. 360–61.

24. Lindsay, *Essentials of Democracy,* p. 45; and Charles Frankel, *The*

Democratic Prospect (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 31–32.

25. Mill, *Representative Government,* pp. 363–64. Mill restricts the applicability of the nationalist principle in a manner parallel to that in which he limits the principle of liberty in *On Liberty:* it is not for barbarians, or, it is subordinate to considerations of progress and civilization.

26. Democratic political rights are declared in Art. 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the right of peoples to self-determination is added in the International Covenants on Civil and Political and on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. For the documents, see Maurice Cranston, *What Are Human Rights?* (New York: Taplinger, 1973), pp. 91, 95, 108. Self-determination, however, may be understood by some members of the U.N. as connoting only anti-European colonialism, and not necessarily democracy within the new countries. Gastil, *Freedom: 1978,* pp. 193–94.

27. See generally Alfred Cobban, *The Nation State and National Self-Determination* (New York: Crowell, 1969).

28. The disputes of the 1930s are enumerated in Richard Hartshorne, "A Survey of the Boundary Problems of Europe," in Charles Carlyle Colby, ed., *Geographical Aspects of International Relations* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, reprint of 1938 ed., 1969), pp. 162–213.

29. Cf. Dankwart A. Rustow, *A World of Nations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1967), p. 59.

30. Eugene Kamenka, "Political Nationalism—the Evolution of the Idea," in E. Kamenka, ed., *Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1976), pp. 13–14. See also Rupert Emerson, "Nationalism and Political Development," *Journal of Politics* 22 (1960), pp. 10–11.

31. C.B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 27–29.

32. Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 43–44, 78–79, and generally. Nationality is not especially important among the factors that determined the success of the 25 states that emerged by 1900 from the 500 or so candidates of 1500. War was the most important factor in determining boundaries.

33. See Robert L. Solomon, "Boundary Concepts and Practices in Southeast Asia," *World Politics* 23 (1970) 1–23. See, more generally, Stephen B. Jones, "Boundary Concepts in the Setting of Place and Time," in de Blij, *Systematic Political Geography,* pp. 162–75.

34. Kristof, "Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries," pp. 136–39.

35. See de Blij, *Systematic Political Geography,* p. 132–35; Julian V. Minghi, "Boundary Studies in Political Geography," in Roger E. Kasperson and Julian V. Minghi, eds., *The Structure of Political Geography* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), pp. 140–60. On military technology and defense, see John H. Herz, "Rise and Demise of the Territorial State," in de Blij, *Political Geography,* pp. 454–65.

36. For a lucid treatment of salience in relation to contract theory, see David Gauthier, "David Hume: Contractarian," *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979) 3–38. Cf. also Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 67–71.

37. The concept of natural boundaries sometimes connotes militarily defensible features as well; in some nationalist theories the "naturalness" of certain geographical limits is related to the alleged destiny of a particular nation.

38. Norman J.G. Pounds, "France and 'Les Limites Naturelles' from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 44 (1954) 51–62. Cf. also the psychological appeal of the symmetrical hexagon by which French children are taught to visualize their country; Laurence Wylie, "Social Change at the Grass Roots," in Stanley Hoffmann et al., *In Search of France* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 205, 227.

39. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation,* ed. George Armstrong Kelly (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 190. See also Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1960), pp. 122–26.

40. Solomon, "Boundary Concepts," p. 10.

41. Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973); a similar point is made in Dahl, *After the Revolution?,* pp. 98–103. Considerations of efficiency with respect to economic development may lead to the same conclusion; see Joseph S. Nye, "Nationalism, Statesmen, and the Size of African States," in Martin Kilson, ed., *New States in the Modern World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 158–68.

42. Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 205. This work is not especially about democracy.

43. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1954), chap. 2, esp. p. 43; see also pp. 26–28.

44. Eric Fischer, "On Boundaries," *World Politics* 1 (1949) 196–222.

45. Only consider the extreme case: questions of social justice or the distribution of resources would be resolved differently than they are if the *world* were a single democratic unit. Cf. the argument of Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), part 3, that national boundaries ought not to limit the scope of social justice.
46. Cf. F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 105–06.