



Democracy's Intrinsic Value

Introduction to Political Theory
Department of Political Economy
King's College London



I. What's at Stake in this Debate

II. Justice vs. Authority

III. Democracy and Equality

IV. Intrinsic and Instrumental Value: False
Dichotomy?



What's at Stake

Instrumental Value

Something is valuable because it *causally contributes* to a good outcome

A hammer only has value insofar as it helps to realize something else of value



What's at Stake

Intrinsic Value

Something is valuable because of some qualities inherent to it or without regard to what it causally contributes to

(Some) art has *intrinsic value* because of its beauty



What's at Stake

Intrinsic and instrumental values are both *reasons* that could weigh into our decision-making (why should we obey outcomes of democratic procedures?)

Important: Intrinsic value does not mean *absolute value*. It just means we have a *pro tanto* reason to do something.



What's at Stake

Intrinsic and instrumental values are both *reasons* that could weigh into our decision-making

Why should we obey outcomes of democratic procedures?

Do we have reasons just because of the *structure of the procedure*?



What's at Stake

Important: Intrinsic value does not mean *absolute value*. It just means we have a *pro tanto* reason to do something.

Democracy could be *intrinsically valuable* but there could be reasons that are *stronger than those intrinsic values* (i.e., violate law to save a life)



What's at Stake

Recall the Instrumental View

Political power can only be justified *by the good consequences it realizes*

Thus, no *inherent* right to exercise power

Voting is an *exercise of such power*



What's at Stake

Permissible, on the instrumentalist view:

Limits on *who can* participate:
Competency requirements to vote

Limits on *what they can decide*: Judicial review, shift of decisions to expert bodies



What's at Stake

“Only property can render men capable of exercising political rights. Only owners can be citizens.”

Benjamin Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments*



What's at Stake

What, if anything, is disrespectful about
non-arbitrary restrictions on who can
vote?

What, if anything, is valuable about being
allowed to vote *as such*?



What's at Stake

Do we reason to *prefer living in a democratic to a non-democratic regime* regardless of outcomes?

If a non-democratic regime can be shown to better protect our basic rights and produce better outcomes, is there any reason to live in a democracy?



Justice vs. Authority

Instrumentalist View

The structure through which laws are created has no relationship to their authority

Laws are only justified if they *contribute to the maximization of justice*



Justice vs. Authority

But do we then have no obligation to obey laws if they *fail* to maximize justice vis-à-vis all feasible alternatives?



Justice vs. Authority

Authority: The idea that we may have an obligation to obey a law *even if we believe that another law would better realize justice*



Justice vs. Authority

Two Concepts that Explain Authority

Coordination

Content-Independent Reasons

A faint, light gray background image of a balance scale. The scale is centered, with a vertical pillar and a horizontal beam. Two pans hang from the beam, and the entire structure is supported by a base. The scale is slightly tilted to the right.

Justice vs. Authority

Coordination

In many circumstances, we may be better off with a subpar single decision-maker than no decision-maker at all



Justice vs. Authority

“If each of us simply acts on her own best understanding of justice and the rights and rules it requires, we will often end up worse off than we would have been had we acted in some coordinated fashion—even if the coordination solution to which we are jointly contributing is in principle less just than the alternative either of us prefers.” pg. 365



Justice vs. Authority

Another way to say this is we have a *content-independent* reason to obey the decisions of coordinating authorities

We obey a law *not just because of what the law realizes* (content) but because of *how the law was made*



Justice vs. Authority

The Flaw in Instrumentalism

Instrumentalist views of democracy cannot explain why we have an obligation to obey laws that fail to maximally realize justice



Democracy and Equality

Viehoff's Suggestion

Democracy may help explain the *authority* of the law *even granting that the law may not be the most just of all feasible alternatives*

Democracy is how we can have *coordination* without *subjection*



Democracy and Equality

Two Other Ways of Understanding
Egalitarian Source of Democratic Authority

1. Equal Standing of Everyone's Judgment
2. Public Recognition of Equality



Democracy and Equality

Responses: Not substituting *my* judgment
but *correct reason*

Unclear why equal respect for capacity for
judgment means accepting someone's
judgment as correct

If I follow law after voting against it, you will
know I view your judgment as wrong



Democracy and Equality

Viehoff's Alternative

Democracy is not about *positive respect for other's judgments* but about *avoiding acting on the sorts of reasons that would undermine egalitarian relationships*



Democracy and Equality

“by treating as binding the outcome of an egalitarian decision procedure, we can avoid acting on various considerations—in particular, unequal power—that we have reason to exclude from our relationship. If democracy has special authority based on procedural equality, this is not because it enables us to rule ourselves, but because it protects us from the threat of being ruled over unequally.”

pg. 374



Democracy and Equality

1. We need political coordination in the face of disagreement
2. To have coordination, we need content-independent reasons for obeying the dictates of our authority



Democracy and Equality

3. We live in a culture where the ideal of relating as equals is widely held
4. Democratic procedures provide us content-independent reasons for obeying a coordinating authority, because it ensures such authority relates us as equals



Democracy and Equality

What does it mean to relate to each other
as equals?

Exclude certain considerations from the
norms and practices that govern
interactions

Considerations that rest on unequal power





Democracy and Equality

Example: Friendship

Even if we are in some ways unequal, it would undermine friendship if that inequality influenced our collective activities

“Friendship is said to be equality”

Aristotle



Democracy and Equality

Democratic Procedures

One Person, One Vote

When we follow the law, we are not acting
based on our unequal power

Rather, we are acting on reasons that
embody our commitment to equality



Democracy and Equality

Some Assumptions

Authority is separate from justice

Non-subjection is a distinct value that can
be realized without justice



Democracy and Equality

Some Assumptions

Can draw an analogy between *personal relationships* like friendship and *political relationships*

What about the *voluntary nature* of personal relationships and the *right to exit*?



Democracy and Equality

Some Assumptions

Consequence: We need to care, not just about the integrity of the procedure, but about whether our co-citizens have the *right motivation and reasons*



Democracy and Equality

“even where a decision is only somewhat unjust, and the procedures themselves distribute political power relatively equally, a decision may lack authority because the citizens vote or act on the basis of the wrong kinds of reasons. This may seem like a surprising claim.” pg. 373




Democracy and Equality

But what about the coordination problem?

Are we ever going to be sure people are
voting for a law for the right reasons

If we worry about this, what will stop
coordination from breaking down?

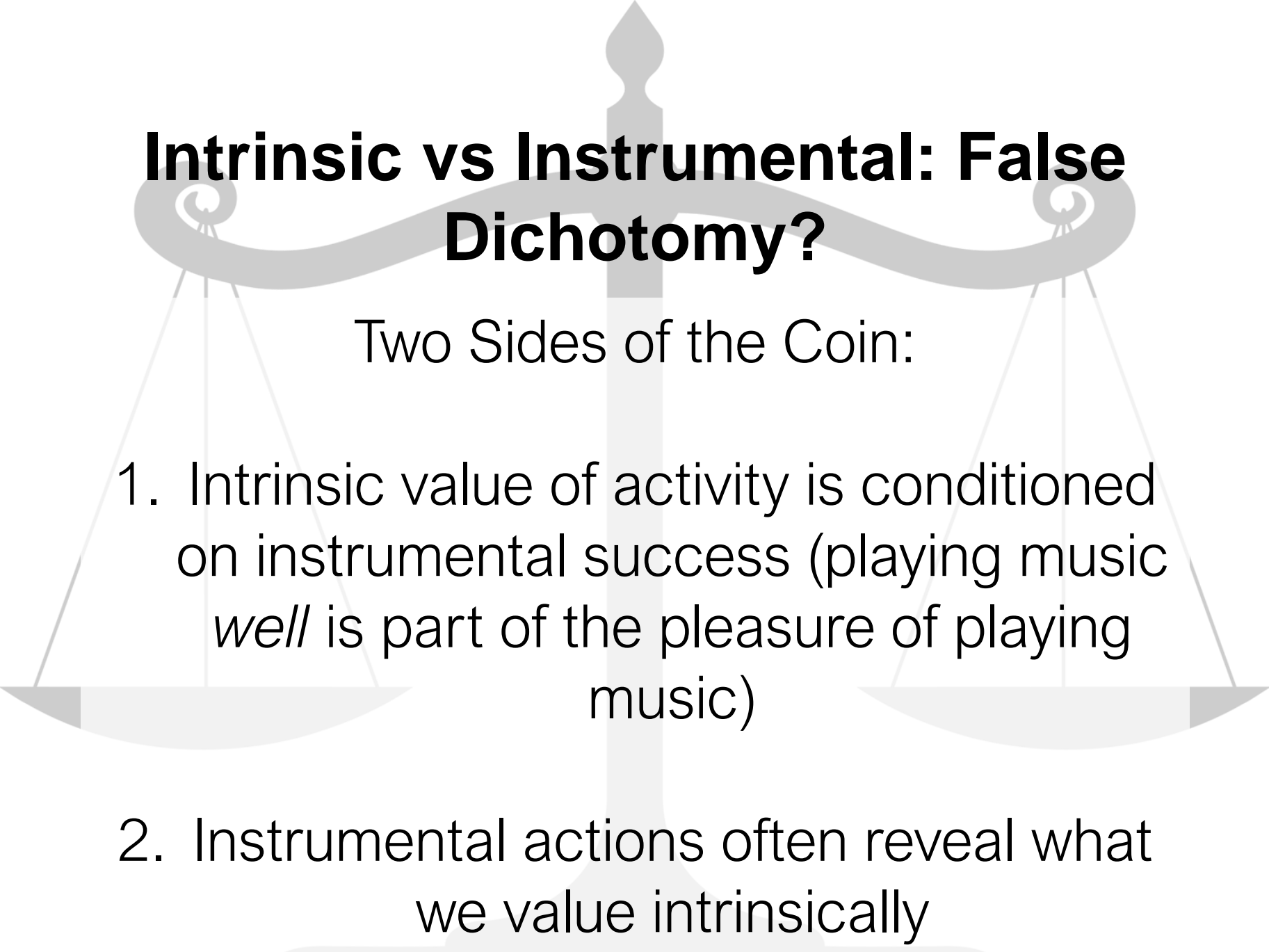


Intrinsic vs Instrumental: False Dichotomy?

Many (most?) activities are both
instrumentally and intrinsically valuable at once

Example: Shopping

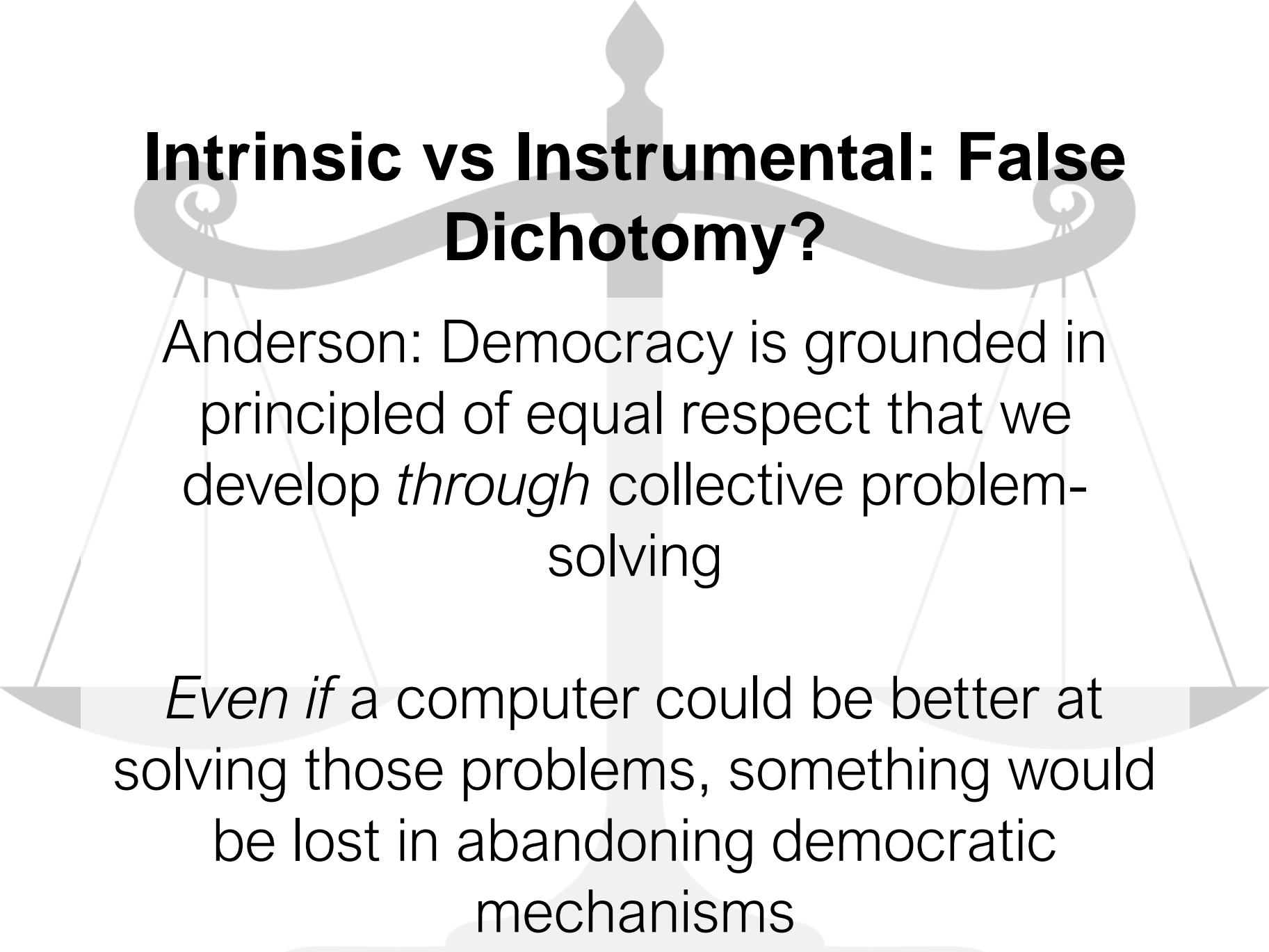
Realizing our ends also entails exercising
our capacities and autonomy



Intrinsic vs Instrumental: False Dichotomy?

Two Sides of the Coin:

1. Intrinsic value of activity is conditioned on instrumental success (playing music *well* is part of the pleasure of playing music)
2. Instrumental actions often reveal what we value intrinsically



Intrinsic vs Instrumental: False Dichotomy?

Anderson: Democracy is grounded in principled of equal respect that we develop *through* collective problem-solving

Even if a computer could be better at solving those problems, something would be lost in abandoning democratic mechanisms

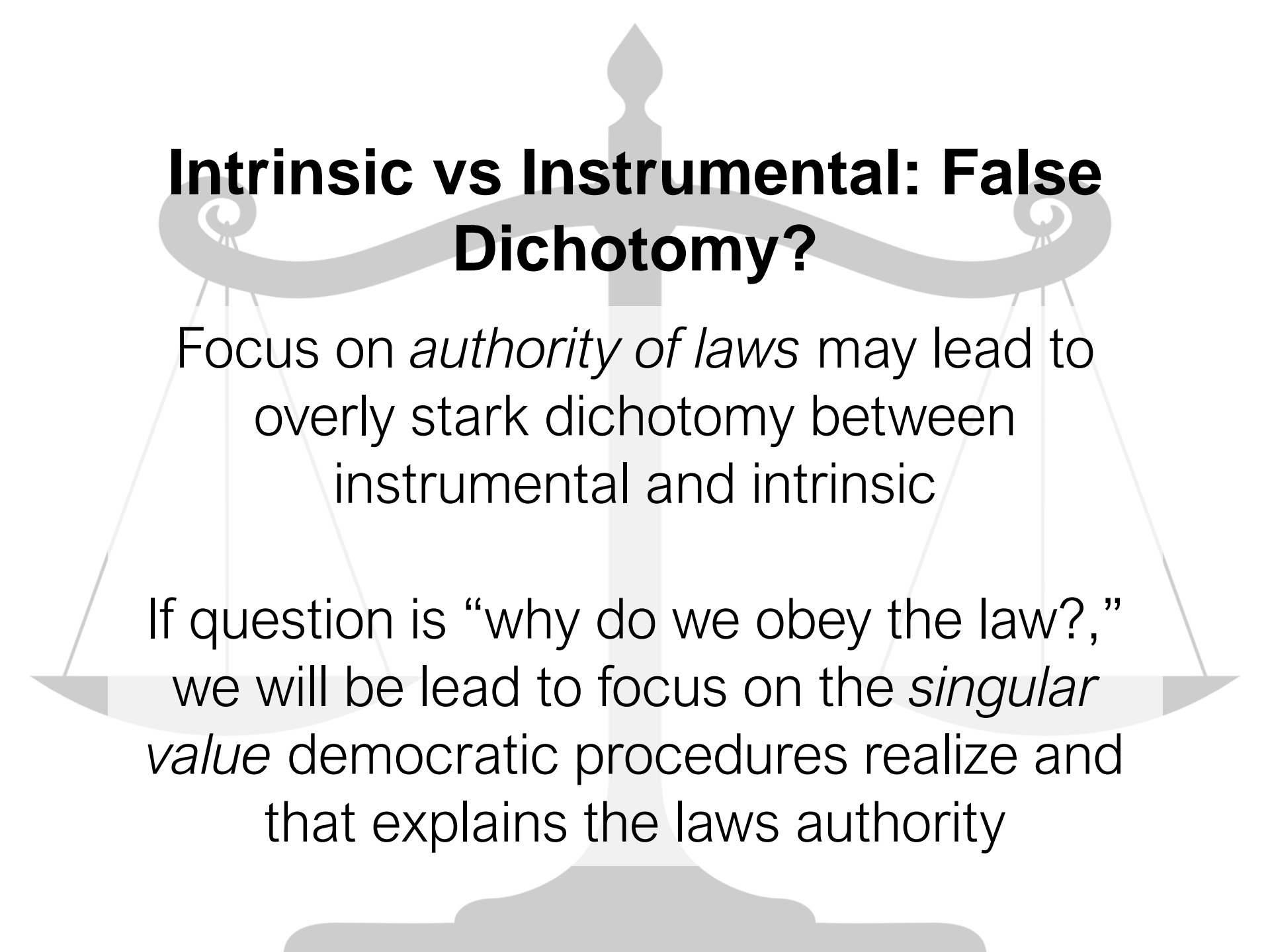


Intrinsic vs Instrumental: False Dichotomy?

Democracy as a Way of Life

Against focus on *institutions and laws*

Success of those institutions requires
broader culture of democracy as a way of
life



Intrinsic vs Instrumental: False Dichotomy?

Focus on *authority of laws* may lead to overly stark dichotomy between instrumental and intrinsic

If question is “why do we obey the law?,” we will be lead to focus on the *singular value* democratic procedures realize and that explains the laws authority