Three Challenges for Long-Term Decision-Making in Democracies: Boundaries, Knowledge, and Incentives

Speaker: Professor Mark Warren

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Abstract

What kinds of challenges do long-term issues such as climate change pose for democratic political systems? First, there is a demos boundary problem: How can we include present decision-making people who do not yet exist? Second, if we can find democratically robust ways of including future generations, how can we know what their interests might be? And third, if we could solve these problems, what incentives do those of us who are living now have to consider the interests of those with no present voice or power? Recent democratic theory can clarify these challenges. With respect to boundaries, we should be using the all affected principle of inclusion combined with temporal representation. With respect to knowledge of future interests, we should maintain conditions of social justice for future generations. With respect to incentives, people are naturally historical in their outlooks. To close the gap between these existential incentives and the future, we need trustworthy institutions that can bind time and generate future capacities.

Biography

Mark E. Warren holds the Harold and Dorrie Merilees Chair for the Study of Democracy at the University of British Columbia. He is especially interested in democratic innovations, civil society and democratic governance, and political corruption. Warren is author of Democracy and Association (Princeton University Press), editor of Democracy and Trust (Cambridge University Press), co-editor of Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly (Cambridge University Press), and co-editor of the Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy. Warren has published articles on democratic theory and practice in American Political Science Review, the American Journal of Political Science, the Journal of Politics, Political Theory, and other leading journals in Political Science. He is currently directing an international team on a project entitled Participedia (www.participedia.net), which uses a web-based platform to collect data about democratic innovations around the world.

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