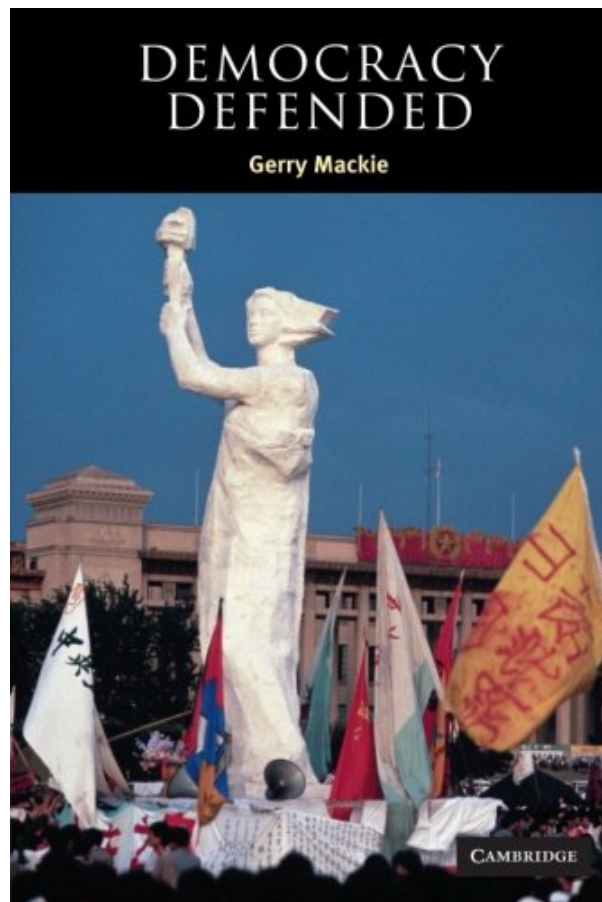


DEMOCRACY DEFENDED
(CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY)
BY GERRY MACKIE



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Review

"...path-breaking, thorough, and innovative...It will be 'must reading' for all who wish to understand democracy given the work in the social field over the last 50 years." Social Justice Research, Joe Oppenheimer

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About the Author

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DEMOCRACY DEFENDED (CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY) BY GERRY MACKIE PDF

Is there a public good? A prevalent view in political science is that democracy is unavoidably chaotic, arbitrary, meaningless, and impossible. Such scepticism began with Condorcet in the eighteenth century, and continued most notably with Arrow and Riker in the twentieth century. In this powerful book, Gerry Mackie confronts and subdues these long-standing doubts about democratic governance. Problems of cycling, agenda control, strategic voting, and dimensional manipulation are not sufficiently harmful, frequent, or irremediable, he argues, to be of normative concern. Mackie also examines every serious empirical illustration of cycling and instability, including Rikers famous argument that the US Civil War was due to arbitrary dimensional manipulation. Almost every empirical claim is erroneous, and none is normatively troubling, Mackie says. This spirited defence of democratic institutions should prove both provocative and influential.

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- Used Book in Good Condition

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About the Author

Gerry Mackie is a Research Fellow at the Research School of Social Sciences, Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University.

Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A Challenge to Orthodoxy

By mungowitz

Democracy Defended is going to be a very important book. In some ways, it harks back to the old "Why So Much Stability?" paper by Tullock in Public Choice in 1981. In other ways, it represents a careful reconsideration of claims, both theoretical and empirical, made by William Riker and others about the incoherence of democracy. But the book is more than that, representing a genuinely original contribution to democratic theory in the largest sense. One can find strands of Rousseau, Habermas, and other defenders of deliberation and democracy, but the perspective is Mackie's own.

The best way to represent the viewpoint succinctly is this: there are two very different ways that democracy might be attacked.

* The first is that, just as Rousseau claimed, if people act selfishly and egoistically government may not work very well. The 51% can expropriate wealth from the other 49%, and even make them slaves. Taxes, public policy, and basic rights may be skewed and distorted. The majority can tyrannize over the minority.

* The second is that there may be a fundamental incoherence in group "will," even if each individual is doing the best he can to achieve the best for the group, rather than himself or herself. All that is required is disagreement in judgments about the right thing to do.

The two require very different defenses, and since the argument is very lengthy I will only summarize it briefly. Mackie argues that the main empirical claim, that cycles should be immanent, is simply false. In fact, it is difficult to find even a single example of a true cycle in either elections or legislative processes. He exhaustively tracks down the background behind every supposed example, and shows that there are important questions about the validity of the evidence marshaled in support of the claims of cyclists. Though I am myself not a fan of Mackie's conclusion, I found myself persuaded that the counterattack he mounts, and the evidence he presents, is very powerful, and should make those who have argued that cycles are everywhere rethink our positions.

He also argues that democracy, both in terms of institutions and the dispositions of participants, simply does not look like the social choice models portray it. Both in terms of personal experience, and a discussion of democracy more generally, he makes a very detailed and closely reasoned defense of a broader conception of democracy, one in which narrow self-interest and strategic action plays a smaller role than that usually described in rational choice theory.

A strikingly original, well-researched, and profound work.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Author's Comments

By G. Mackie

In an earlier post, I observed that the Amazon description of the book was flawed, and quoted the authorized book description provided by Cambridge University Press. Since then, the Amazon description has been corrected.

The only way I can post a comment is to rate my book, apologies for that.

The American Political Science Association bestowed on Democracy Defended the 2004 Gladys M. Kammerer Award for the best political science publication in 2003 in the field of U.S. national policy.

To date, the book is reviewed as follows:

Sven Wilson, 2004, review, *Perspectives on Political Science* 33(4):228-229.

Melvin Hinich, 2005, review, *Perspectives on Politics* 3(1):163-165.

Joe Oppenheimer, 2005, review essay, *Social Justice Research* 18(1):83-98.

Don Herzog, 2005, review essay, *University of Chicago Law Review* 72(2):757-776

Saul Levmore, 2005, review essay, *University of Chicago Law Review* 72(2):777-796.

Reviews may be forthcoming in the journals *Government and Opposition*, and *Public Choice*. Please notify author of reviews.

The book challenges, in depth, the following works:

Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*

William H. Riker, *Liberalism against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*

William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*

Interesting companion volumes might be:

Donald Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*

S.M. Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism*

Gerry Mackie

6 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Suspect sociology of democracy

By John C. Landon

This is an important challenge to the various writings of Arrow and his social choice theorems on democracy. And it is long overdue. The material is not easily accessible save by someone in the field and this compendium is invaluable for a relative outsider aware of this scholarship but unable to proceed into the details. As the author notes, one can only wonder at the influence of the views of Arrow and his followers on a whole generation of students now global executives, stewards of industry, and diplomats. The apparent rigor of this kind of mathematicized sociology hides the often spurious character of these exercises in ideology (with Neo-Classical economics the champ in this deceptive vein). The behind the scenes influence of

this kind of thinking needs an alertness to its actual effects, which aren't speculative, e.g. the Chinese propaganda system is known to exploit this thinking for its legitimation purposes.

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