



Democratic Autonomy: Public Reasoning about the Ends of Policy (Oxford Political Theory)

Henry S. Richardson

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What would our decision-making procedures look like if they were actually guided by the much-discussed concept of "deliberative democracy"? What does rule by the people for the people entail? And how can a modern government's reliance on administrative agencies be reconciled with this populist ideal? What form must democratic reasoning take in the modern administrative state?

Democratic Autonomy squarely faces these challenges to the deliberative democratic ideal. It identifies processes of reasoning that avert bureaucratic domination and bring diverse people into political agreement. To bridge our differences intelligently, Richardson argues, we cannot rely on instrumentalist approaches to policy reasoning, such as cost-benefit analysis. Instead, citizens must arrive at reasonable compromises through fair, truth-oriented processes of deliberation. Using examples from programs as diverse as disability benefits and environmental regulation, he shows how the administrative policy-making necessary to carrying out most legislation can be part of our deciding what to do. Opposing both those liberal theorists who have attacked the populist ideal and those neo-republican theorists who have given up on it, Richardson builds an account of popular rule that is sensitive to the challenges to public deliberation that arise from relying on liberal constitutional guarantees, representative institutions, majority rule, and administrative rulemaking. Written in a nontechnical style and engaged with practical issues of everyday politics, this highly original and rigorous restatement of what democracy entails is essential reading for political theorists, philosophers, public choice theorists, constitutional and administrative lawyers, and policy analysts.

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