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Democratic inclusion: approaches and problems

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The boundaries of the demos determine who is entitled to participate in the making of collectively binding decisions. But what are the right boundaries? The issue is of practical significance when evaluating the democratic legitimacy of laws that regulate access to the vote in putatively democratic states but also when we address the rules governing participation in other associations. The problem is also theoretically significant to the extent that inclusion is a basic requirement of democracy. In the absence of an account of the conditions for democratic inclusion, we are unable to tell what democracy requires.

Surprisingly, democratic theory has yet failed to provide a convincing normative yardstick of democratic inclusion. In this presentation I introduce some of the suggested solutions and sketch the starting points of an alternative approach that I believe is a more fruitful. My favored approach involve two distinct steps. The first is to focus on norms and how collective decisions impinge on the norms that apply to individuals. The second is to address the moral importance of democratic decisions in virtue of their expected outcomes. Together, these considerations allow us to determine when democratic inclusion is applicable and when it is morally required.