

DEMOCRACY AS CONSENSUS? THE CASE OF ARTIFICIAL CONSENSUS

Author(s) / Auteur(s) :

Gianfranco MINATI

Mathématicien, Systems Scientist

Président de l'Union européenne de systémique (UES)

Président de l'Association Italienne pour la Recherche en systémique (AIRS)

gianfranco.minati@airs.it

<http://www.gianfrancominati.net/>

Abstract / Résumé :

We consider here how democracy cannot be reduced to consensus and majority voting without taking in count contextual systemic social properties. We intend Democracy as context-sensitive, emergent property of social systems. We consider possible empirical confirmatory approaches to be used in case of strategic decisions as in the case of the Brexit. We present the example of medical practice where no physician would decide a medical treatment on the base of a diagnosis having little more than fifty percent of probabilities to be true (neither a judge would condemn a defendant in court). In the post-industrial, knowledge societies we must face the end of the identity between universal suffrage and democracy.

Keywords / Mots-clés :

consensus, majority, manipulation, post-democratic society

DEMOCRACY AS POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

The concept of democracy comes from various elaborations occurred in history.

Compared to ancient democracy, which is essentially a direct democracy, the modern is therefore connoted primarily as *representative*.

Particularly, the modern democracy identifies that specific form of state in which the principles of liberal constitutionalism have merged with the principle of *popular sovereignty*.

So, if the *universal suffrage* sanctioned the full affirmation of the so-called majority principle, whereby decisions are taken by the majority and the minority conforms to them, giving full expression to the principle of *popular sovereignty*.

This is balanced by a series of limitations and obligations aimed at guaranteeing the rights of minorities.

The basic idea is that the power comes from the popular sovereignty.

DEMOCRACY AS EMERGENT PROPERTY?

Nowadays democracy may be considered as *emergent property* continuously acquired by collective systems of homogeneous, *equivalent* agents.

This emergent property does not reduce to follow the *same* synchronisation(s).

It is not even matter of correlated behaviours and variance.

It is matter of emergence of possible multiple different, but compatible coherences.

The problem is to keep emergence and balance with respect of rules (boundary conditions), the possibility to collectively *decide*, e.g., collective intelligence of a flock escaping a predator, and *design* change.

Delegation without confirmations sounds a reduction.

DEMOCRACY AND CONSENSUS

We focus here on *consensus* as key aspect of democracy.

It relates to techniques, methods, procedures.

It also relates to *boundary conditions*, i.e., contextual requirements allowing individuals to have granted almost the same minimum availability of *resources*, e.g., material, social, cultural, and informational.

This was easier when ancient social systems had simple life style.

However such easiness was often *perturbed* by *enlightened (?) oligarchies*, overwhelming leaderships, and religious issues.

Modern democracy is formally based on the *universal suffrage*.

The formality is assumed as a guarantee of impartiality. And this generally works.

The problem is manipulation, not equal availability of resources to build *artificial consensus*.

The consensus is said *artificial* when it is reached within a context of *unequally* available resources and through on purpose manipulations.

Usually such *inequality* may be due, e.g., to economical and social reasons, or *artificial*, i.e. designed by processes of manipulation, e.g., allowing partial information, focusing on aspects, details to be then *artfully* generalised.

DEMOCRACY AND MANIPULATION

Democracy should be not reduced to the validation of process of *delegation*.

Democracy should have representatives, generators of projects and new boundary conditions in need of social confirmations.

We should escape the current attraction for *optimised* solutions, assumed due to undisputable computations and to scientific reasons.

This is very related to the easy processability and availability of information, text, sound and image, allowed in post-industrial societies by a large amount of techniques, e.g., the Internet and mass information, that is *identically* and *simultaneously* reproduced in large quantities.

Democracy should resume responsibility and shared knowledge.

I think it could be sociologically very helpful to *unmask* processes of manipulation, such as linguistic, due to partial information, and artificial correlations.

‘Advertising’ familiarises, for instance, with such techniques considered first acceptable when dealing with products. Also, it familiarize with the fact that the messages have to last and be processed (consumed?) very quickly.

In reality this makes people to familiarise with a way of thinking then implicitly extended, used for other contexts.

This occurs mainly because of the *combination* of knowledge societies based on information and consumerist societies based on easy to use and general availability of goods and services.

However such *unmasking process* may be in its turn applied only to some cases and become another more sophisticated process of manipulation.

DEMOCRACY AND MAJORITY CONSENSUS

We propose to consider distinction between *democracy* and *democratic consensus* intended as *majority decisions*.

Democracy should be *not* reduced to issues of majority and voting procedures.

Democracy should be intended as *emergent property* continuously acquired by social systems. This emergent property has multiple coherent properties dynamically changing along time. Examples of such properties constituting in turn all together the emerging property of democracy are Equality, Full information (all the truth, only the truth and nothing but the truth), General availability of fundamental rights, No manipulations, Peace, Tolerance for diversity. Only in this context democracy may emerge and *materialise* into democratic procedures of consensus Minati (2004a) giving meaning to majority decisions.

Context-independent majority decisions only *formally* represent the popular will.

In case, for any reasons, such upstream conditions and properties should be not completely available it is possible to take *empirical* approaches.

For instance when the voting is for crucial choices and when the value of the difference between two alternatives is less than a percentage, e.g., 5 per cent, a second round of voting should be allowed.

This to allow people to confirm or rethink their vote and allow abstained in the first round to vote.

Another possibility is to require, at the first round, a minimum high percentage of voters. If the difference between the two possibilities in question is less than 5 per cent then a second run should be allowed and percentage lower than 5 per cent may be accepted for the validity of the decision.

The first run of voting may help to make explicit the trends and use not anymore the polls to know in advance voting intentions.

A voting having strategic effects may require to be *confirmed* after a significant amount of time letting *evaporate* slogans and non applicable radicalisms.

We experience since several years the profound effects of manipulations Minati (2006). This is a kind of post-democracy.

We have not to forget that Hitler was regularly elected with large majority.

With reference, as current example, to the Brexit and the democracy we are facing to the terrible consequences to *reduce* democracy to majority.

Furthermore, who would accept the decision of a physician, for example, that on the basis of information available to him/her considers the 51.8% of probabilities that a particular patient has a certain disease, and 48.2% of the contrary and decides to treat the patient for that disease (or *mutatis mutandis* a judge would decide to convict or not an individual)? This is for context-less probabilities, considered as absolute, independent from the configuration considered by the observer, see De Finetti (1975).

The *responsibility* of the choices is what social systems are going to forget, as we rely more and more on formal and static procedures and algorithms, and not on context-sensitive, dynamic and updatable procedures Minati (2004b). Sorry that the home of pragmatism, of Hume and Bayes, has regressed to that point.

In the post-industrial Minati (2013), knowledge societies Minati (2012a; 2012b) we must face the end of the *identity* between universal suffrage and democracy.

SYSTEMS SCIENCE FOR DEMOCRACY: PROPOSALS

The revealing of processes and techniques of manipulation could diffuse a **higher awareness**, allow lower impact for artificial interventions, and **increase acceptance**, confidence of government actions recognised as truthful, positive.

CONCLUSIONS

This may be the role of *science of complexity*, the 2.0 version of *systems thinking*, **using new concepts in the context of the science of communication and psychology**.

Examples of new concepts are emergence, self-organisation, collective behaviour, coherence, context-dependence, and induce rather than prescribe.

How induce higher awareness?

Systems societies and systems researchers may produce text for books, articles, and short movies, e.g., to be posted in YouTube and Facebook; diffuse and even *sell* games and videogames allowing to know and recognize manipulation techniques (then more easily recognised and neutralised); and offer courses, present case studies and *services* in the framework of the *communication sciences*.

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