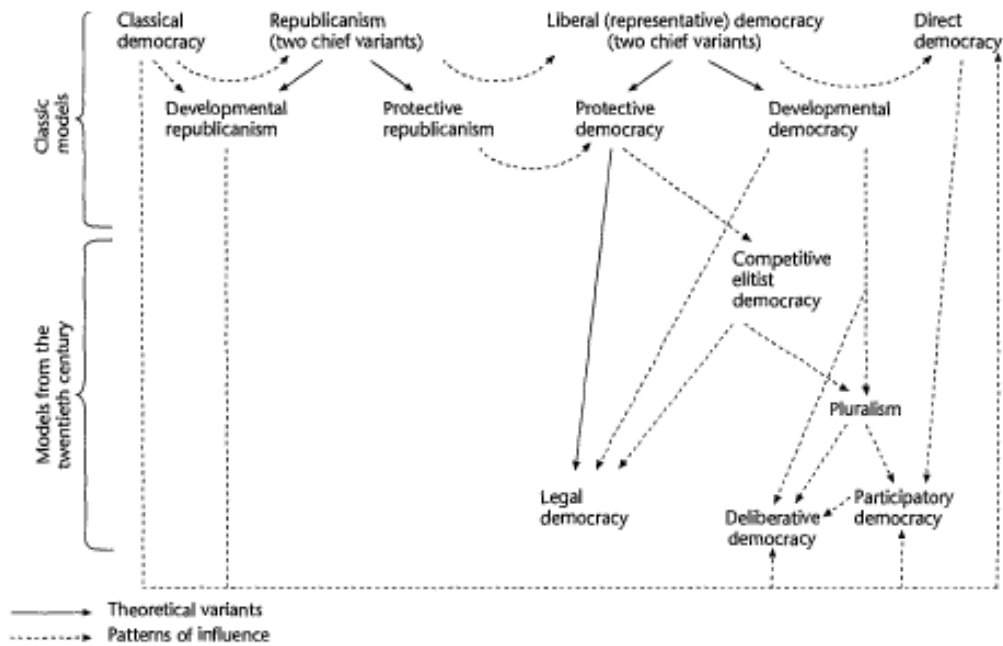


David Held surveys the history of democratic thought and practice, discerning nine general models or forms of democratic theory (Held 1987). This paper will give a brief synopsis of these models, followed by a sustained examination of the author's preferred candidate, Model IX. At the broadest level, Held distinguishes between direct and representative democracy. He discerns two main variants of both republicanism and representative democracy, and distinguishes between classical and direct democracy. In addition, he asserts that each of these theories is a blending of normative and descriptive elements (p.7). The chart below is helpful in tracing Held's conceptual taxonomy.



Model I (“Classical Democracy”) is of course the Athenian democracy in all its glorious imperfection, basing the claim to political equality on the necessity of ruling and being ruled in turn. A sovereign assembly directly controlled by an exclusive group of citizens administers the state through officeholders selected by several methods, principally by lot (sortition). Held argues that this model requires a small scale to function, as well as a relatively homogeneous

population subsisting on slave labor. Model II (“Protective Democracy”) is based on the idea that citizens require protection from the all-powerful state, as well as from one another. Government is conducted by representatives of a sovereign people, who express their wishes via regular elections. The wishes of the government are implemented through impersonal laws and a professional civil service.

In Model III (“Developmental Democracy”), by contrast, democracy is justified on the basis of an equal right to freedom and collective development. This requires direct participation by citizens in public proceedings, as well as a relatively homogeneous community featuring low inequality. Model IV (“Direct Democracy”) proposes complete political and economic equality as the prerequisite for the development of all, with public affairs governed collectively and the abolition of class and private property. Model V (“Competitive Elitist Democracy”) draws on the work of Weber and Schumpeter to conclude that in complex modern societies only a skilled political elite can meet the demands of technocratic government. This requires parliamentary government with a strong executive, as well as robust competition among rival parties to control an independent bureaucratic administration. However, this model is said to be limited to conditions of constitutional or practical limits on the scope or range of political decisions.

Thus far, Held has covered familiar ground. The remaining models are more intriguing. Model VI (“Pluralism”) sees politics as the open contest for power among diverse groups and individuals in society, with no political center or majority of any kind. Politics only marginally impacts the underlying political consensus in any society, and the powers of one group offset those of another to make radical change unlikely or impossible. Held criticizes pluralism for defining democracy in terms of the actual features of postwar liberal democratic states, transmuting empirical findings (such as widespread political apathy) into theoretical virtues. In

addition, he disputes the idea of a value consensus in modern societies. The neo-pluralist model attempts to remediate these deficiencies by incorporating Marxian insights, with mixed results. Critics of pluralism such as Miliband, Offe and Poulantzas argue that defense of private property is fundamental to the state institutions of liberal democracy, and that these institutions consequently entrench existing inequalities. On this view, the state is not merely passive but acts to construct and alter socioeconomic realities (p.209). Offe articulates the state's "structurally contradictory position" as it attempts to impartially arbitrate among class interests even as it acts in its institutional self-interest to sustain the process of differential accumulation from which it draws its revenue. As a result, the state will repeatedly select compromises that come at the expense of vulnerable groups ("strategies of displacement"), leading to vicious circles of limited- or non-participation in politics.

Held traces the development of the New Right and its associated Model VII ("Legal Democracy"). Emerging from protective democracy (see chart), legal democracy emphasizes the political and economic integration among groups and classes in a society, arguing that this integration reinforces the stability of the political and social system. Legal democracy is concerned to advance liberalism at the expense of democracy, specifically by limiting the democratic use of state power via constitutions, in order to ensure the right to pursue one's own ends. Building on the views of Hayek and Nozick, this account is premised on a realistic understanding of demotic power, specifically on the acceptance that the *demos* will often act unwisely. It is also premised on the idea that only individuals know what they truly want. On this understanding, democracy is at best an instrumental device for safeguarding liberty.



These principles are enhanced by devolved government, particularly direct, local participation by as many citizens as possible.<sup>1</sup>

Held's own contribution, Model IX ("Democratic Autonomy"), is an attempt to reconcile the preceding models by arguing that they each attempt to foster the autonomy of the democratic citizen. Held's "Principle of Autonomy" holds that individuals should be free and equal in determining the conditions of their own lives, subject to Mill's familiar qualification that they refrain from impairing such freedom in others. While this is familiar territory, Held's consideration of the "conditions of enactment" required for the principle of autonomy to operate adds new elements to the discussion. Pointing to the complementarity of liberalism's skepticism of political power and Marxism's skepticism of economic power, Held argues that these traditions have failed to acknowledge the non-political impediments to full participation in democratic life. Held defines politics more broadly, as the capacity of social agents to transform their environment. This implies that politics will be a universal dimension of human life found in all group interactions, not merely those explicitly denoted "political". This is not, however, to expand the definition of the state, which is distinct and separate from civil society. Building on the critique made by the New Left, Held argues that autonomy is so important as to require the sacrifice of participation when these goals conflict (p.281). Held calls for a "double democratization" of both the state and civil society, particularly equal rights to enjoy the conditions for effective participation. The state and civil society, on this view, mutually contribute to each other's democratic development.

Despite his stated purpose to introduce models of democracy "from Greece to the present day," Held makes three surprising omissions. First, he gives only cursory attention to the

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that participatory democracy calls for disintermediating party elites and allowing party members to directly select officeholders. This has been tried in the United Kingdom in recent years, and has not been an unalloyed success.

Polybian mixed constitution, which was the dominant democratic tradition in Crete, the Peloponnesus and Sicily (Polybius, *The Histories*). Second, he avoids the oligarchic democracies in the Phoenician tradition, principally Carthage, Tyre and Sidon, and skips their few Greek analogues (such as Corinth). Finally, Held entirely omits any discussion of federal leagues in the ancient world. The councils of these leagues made their decisions on a democratic basis. Indeed, a detailed study of the workings of the Achean and Aetolian leagues was a vital part of James Madison's preparation for writing the US Constitution (James Madison, *Selected Letters*). Similarly, the revolutionary American concept of dual sovereignty, where citizens are protected against each other by their state governments and against their state governments by the Federal government, is nowhere to be found.

A recurring issue in all nine models is whether democracy is an instrumental set of procedures or a normatively-laden way of life. I wonder whether it might not be both at once. Instrumental procedures with a high success rate frequently take on normative dimensions. A social norm may begin as an instrumental process and accrete otiose or irrelevant normative detail in the fullness of time. More intriguingly, the normative concept seems to predate the instrumental concept by two millennia. Despite its ethical benefits, the fortunes of actual democratic states threw democracy's instrumental value into question. The modern era may be the first time that technological progress has salvaged the efficiency losses of democratic deliberation, putting the aristocratic vision of a self-directed good life ("ruling and being ruled in turn") within reach of virtually everyone.

**1,470 words**