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## Democracy Defended

Is there a public good? A prevalent view in political science is that democracy is unavoidably chaotic, arbitrary, meaningless, and impossible. Such skepticism 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 Riker's 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.

GERRY MACKIE is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. He has been Research Fellow, Social and Political Theory Program, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University; and Junior Research Fellow in Politics, St. John's College, University of Oxford.

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As the twenty-first century begins, major new political challenges have arisen at the same time as some of the most enduring dilemmas of political association remain unresolved. The collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War reflect a victory for democratic and liberal values, yet in many of the Western countries that nurtured those values there are severe problems of urban decay, class and racial conflict, and failing political legitimacy. Enduring global injustice and inequality seem compounded by environmental problems, disease, the oppression of women, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and the relentless growth of the world's population. In such circumstances, the need for creative thinking about the fundamentals of human political association is manifest. This new series in contemporary political theory is needed to foster such systematic normative reflection.

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To Agnes and Renée

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— What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls  
and ate up their brains and imagination? (Ginsberg 1956, 17)

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Before graduate school I operated in a competitive political environment where argument was harsh but friendly. As a result, earlier drafts of this material were in part too polemical for the academic setting, and I regret that. My thanks to several people, and especially to one eloquent reviewer, who convinced me to reform permanently my rhetorical habits. Further, I want it understood that my criticisms of arguments imply no personal disrespect for the thinkers who authored them. I agree with

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Jevons (1871, 275–276), that:

If, instead of welcoming inquiry and criticism, the admirers of a great author accept his writings as authoritative, both in their excellences and in their defects, the most serious injury is done to truth. In matters of philosophy and science, authority has ever been the great opponent of truth. A despotic calm is usually the triumph of error. In the republic of the sciences, sedition and even anarchy are beneficial in the long run to the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

I have tried to avoid errors, but I discover more of my own every time I revise the manuscript. All scholars err, despite their best efforts. My purpose in this volume is not the allegation of error for its own sake, but rather to show that a pattern of errors lies behind the irrationalist view of democracy.

Portions of Chapter 2 appeared in abbreviated form in Gerry Mackie, “All Men are Liars,” in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Bits and pieces of this material are included in a brief essay, “Saving Democracy from Political Science,” in Robert Dahl, Ian Shapiro, and Jose Cheibub, eds., *The Democracy Sourcebook*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. This volume is a revision and expansion of my Ph.D thesis, “Is Democracy Impossible? A Preface to Deliberative Democracy,” University of Chicago, 2000. Otherwise the material is unpublished elsewhere.

When I was a small child living in the country outside the small lumber town of Coquille, Oregon, USA, my mother, Agnes I.H. Mackie, drove me to the library every week, and otherwise always encouraged my aberrant intellectual inclinations. I remember exactly and vividly how delighted she was when I read out my first words. I dedicate the volume to her memory, and to my mother-in-law, Renée Heiman, who has consistently supported my son Brendan and I through life’s difficulties.

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