

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

Critically examine Macpherson's view on democracy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 **Macpherson** defends democracy as human development, not electoral procedure → modern theory has lost classical democracy's moral purpose
- R2 strength = restoring democracy's moral core → open question = is his remedy realisable

Body flow

empirical school attacked (**Schumpeter** → elites for votes / **Dahl** → group competition) → both reduce democracy to a market-equilibrium system → procedure, not emancipation; humanist aspiration weakened → classical moral foundation recalled (developmental process + emancipation) → liberal democracy's self-image rejected (no liberal monopoly, not the perfect form) → property franchise, workers' rights only after socialist pressure → liberalism historically undemocratic → communist / Third World systems may also qualify → core distinction: extractive vs developmental power → capitalism gives the propertied class both, workers keep minimal developmental power, lose creative freedom → ideal democracy: maximise developmental power, remove extractive power → three spheres: constitutional + socialist production + equality values → democracy not built on institutions alone

Counter-view

Norman Barry: the ideal is idealistic, hard to realise under scarcity → abolishing extractive power assumes conditions that rarely hold

Conclusion routes

- R1 his worth lies in retrieval — democracy recovered as creative freedom and human development
- R2 judged by feasibility the prescription falls short, but the moral recovery of democracy is his real contribution

CB Macpherson offers one of the strongest defences of democracy as human development rather than electoral procedures. He argues that modern democratic theory has lost the moral purpose of classical democracy. His strength lies in restoring that purpose, the real question is whether his remedy can be realised.

Schumpeter reduces democracy to competition among elites for votes and Robert Dahl's pluralism to competition among groups. In *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, Macpherson argues that both treat democracy as a market-equilibrium system. Democracy then becomes a procedure, not emancipation and its humanist aspiration is weakened.

He is equally critical of liberal democracy's self-image. In *The Real World of Democracy*, he denies that liberalism has a monopoly over democracy or that it is democracy's perfect form. Liberalism has thus often been historically undemocratic and communist or 3rd world systems may also qualify where they enjoy genuine mass support and reduce suffering.

The diagnostic core is his distinction between extractive and developmental power. Extractive power coaxes others and draws benefit from them, reducing their capacity; developmental power enhances one's own capacities and allows creative work without compulsion.

His ideal democracy follows from this. It maximises developmental power, removes extractive power and works across the legal-political economic and cultural spheres; constitutional structures, a socialist mode of production and values of human equality together. Democracy for him, cannot rest on institutions alone.

The weakness lies here. Norman Barry finds this ideal hard to realise under scarcity, since abolishing extractive power assumes conditions that rarely hold. Macpherson's lasting worth is not the feasibility of his prescription but his recovery of democracy as creative freedom and human development.