

The Mundane in the Crisis of Democracy

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Summary

In this paper, I argue that progress in research on democratic backsliding can be made by focusing on the everyday lives of ordinary people, and I engage research from the lived religion tradition in doing so. While some lived religion research reifies “religion” as a concept, potentially separating it from the social world in artificial ways, its focus on the everyday experiences of normal people and the potential to engage the institutions and norms that structure those experiences offers a promising window for understanding the roots of the crises in democracy. I work to engage the lived religion trajectory by recovering the concept of social practice, focusing particularly on the distinction between internal and external goods. In illustrating how the neglect of the distinction in goods blunts the potential of the social practice concept in the work of some contemporary scholars, I point to the increasing insidiousness of external goods—especially money and partisan political jockeying—in the information landscape. The thorough instrumentalization of communication across traditional and social media, driven by external concerns, I argue, erodes trust in institutions and civic culture, contributing to the democratic crisis.

Outline

1. Introduction
 - a. Problems in multidisciplinary research on democratic backsliding
 - b. Crises as masking the mundane
 - c. The lived religion project and social practices
2. Lived Religion and Social Practice
 - a. Lived religion trajectories
 - b. The social practice idea
 - i. Alasdair MacIntyre (standards of excellence as well as internal and external goods)
 - ii. Jeffrey Stout
 1. On tradition
 2. Emphasis on standards of excellence
 - iii. Following Stout: Stephen S. Bush and Molly Farneth
 - iv. Recovering the significance of external goods
3. Democracy and the Goods of Discourse
 - a. Stout
 - i. Democracy as a tradition
 - ii. Giving and taking reasons as a practice
 - b. MacIntyre on the virtues necessary to sustain a practice
 - i. Honesty
 - ii. Courage
 - iii. Justice
 - c. Three types of communication in democracy

- i. Discussions among friends
 - ii. Political soundbites
 - iii. Advertisements
- d. The goods of democratic discourse
 - i. External
 - ii. Internal

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