

## BOOK REVIEW

# Approaching Deliberative Democracy: Theory and Practice

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*Approaching Deliberative Democracy: Theory and Practice*

Robert Cavallier (ed.)

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The discussion about deliberative democracy is one of the most important issues in contemporary political theory and philosophy. Deliberation is the way that we can understand democracy, especially now that we are experiencing the crisis. The ideal of deliberation has established a new framework. Deliberation reveals the meaning of active participation through argumentative procedures that is based on the forgotten true meaning of dialogue. Consequently “the more we talk, the more we see- and the better we can judge ‘what we ought to do’” (p.14).

In what ways “deliberation” and “democracy” mutually influence one another? And in what ways can this relational influence be productive? Why is deliberation the best solu-

tion? Which are the problems, if we try to put it in practice? These questions and others are addressed in this book.

Robert Cavalier provides a brief but substantial introduction on the most important aspects of deliberation as well as references to the most influential scholars (Habermas, Rawls, Gutmann & Thompson, Young, Fiskin etc.) of this area. The references compiled here will be an invaluable starting point for anyone wishing to conduct research in deliberation. The essays themselves are grouped methodologically into two sections: theory and practice. The theoretical part (three chapters) works as a filter in order to stress how deliberation could be realizable (six chapters).

In the first chapter, S. M. Amadae focuses on the meaning of deliberation as a method in order to find answers about the better cooperation of participants for solving the primacy of economy in the name of every problem. She uses two poles: the work of John Rawls from the one side and James M. Buchanan theory from the other. She contrasts the two theories to deal with the gaps in the proper form of

government. She argues about the strength of cooperation and the meaning of the person in a deliberative process.

While that position may leave readers somewhat displaced, Benjamin Barber deconstructs the meaning of deliberation in the frame of globalization and brings up the concept of citizenship wondering about the difficulties that raised a deliberation method. "People are born knowing what they want and what they desire, they are not born deliberative" (p.65). His attempt focuses on translating deliberation in terms of citizenship, so as to explain that the problem is to be found in the way that we settle the question about deliberation as: "the ability to think like a citizen not a consumer, to think in public and in common rather than in private terms [...]" (p.68). After all Barber underlines which is the new challenge that democracy needs to deal with.

In some point the next chapter from Gerry Mackie which comes to give some answers to Barber's thoughts emphasizes to the importance of voting. "Voters are most strongly motivated by duty and by desires to influence the social outcome". (p. 93). According to Mackie our societies turn to the deliberation from the moment that aggregation conception of democracy lost its meaning. His proposal is to use deliberation in order to improve voting because through deliberation is understandable the delimitation of voting.

In a next level of the volume the contribution of Christian List and Anne Sliwka is to examine how is pragmatically oriented the cooperation of aggregative and deliberative democracy. They provide for that an interesting counterpoint to the conception of "consensus" and "meta-consensus" using the model of J. Fiskin – although some parameters were different such as: "was not a random sample of the reference population" (p. 118) - so as to study deliberation in educational contexts. Their case studies were a workshop of the German Students' Academy that lasted two and a half weeks. At the end they accomplished to portray that deliberation increases democratic effectiveness.

In the same area Julie Marsh offers an interesting empirical research for educational issues. She applies the deliberation model in two different cases with disparate results. On the occasion of these two case studies was showed up which kind of problems are occurred in a deliberation procedure. Marsh points out that the obstacles of deliberation as confirmed from her research are related to the way that participation must work, the lack of confidence in deliberation, the ability using the language and the way that both participants and leaders use their power for persuading the others for their arguments.

Gregory J. Crowley as a kind of continuity in the previous chapter emphasizes to the role of trust and inclusion, especially when the last one should be present at each level of deliberation. He underlines: "I have illustrated a strategy for how to organize inclusion into three dimensions of deliberative design: the invitation, the deliberation and the action" (p. 194). So is referring also to the necessity of correspondence between talk and action through an empirical research, using the method of J. Fiskin.

The next chapter "Deliberative Polling in Pennsylvania: From Student Senate to State Senate" concentrates on the meaning of "deliberative polls" in order to bear it out as a necessary condition in a deliberative procedure mostly when should be integrated conversations and results at an institutional level. Within the project demonstrated the prospect of public opinion to be used as instigation to policy practices. "Consistent with the vision of preparing students to be 'architects of change' [...] one of the primary objectives of this initiative is to encourage students to cultivate their skills in ways that promote a sense of social responsibility and assist in their preparation for a life of leadership and impact" (p.208). The thematic was about issues of legal recognition of same sex-relationships even through marriage.

The next two chapters expand the notion of deliberation to the online deliberation. The results of the empirical research in the first case were positive. It was about two groups which have discussed (Electronic Dialogue Project)

“about issues facing the country and the unfolding presidential campaign” and (The Healthcare Dialogue Project) about health policies. The last essay from Robert Cavalier approaches the issue of e-democracy and the related problems dealing with lack of information and vision, when people take part in a deliberation. He suggests something more structured referring to online tools that in the case of e-democracy are necessary. For that he utilizes the Project PICOLA (Public Informed Citizen Online Assembly) that works like a Virtual Agora.

To sum up, this volume summarizes the most important notions of deliberation clarifying the connection between “democracy” and “deliberation” maintaining the balance between them. It highlights every aspect of deliberation

without enclosing it only to politics. It is a book as its title points out that confronts with the problems that deliberative democracy arises not only in theory but also in practice. Even when I found myself in disagreement with a contributor’s argument, I was often struck by the writer’s passion for and knowledge of deliberation democracy. The book is a real success at shedding new light on many long-standing problems in deliberative democracy. As well as content, methodology attends its purpose too. The volume will benefit specialists and non-specialists, theorists and practitioners. Obviously my briefly remarks cannot do justice to the high level of scholarship and intellectual intricacy in these essays.

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