

Critique of Deliberative Democracy: A Critical Assessment

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ABSTRACT

In the present scenario, liberal democracy is the universally recognized legitimate form of government. American President Bush Jr. and his philosopher adviser Fukuyama claimed triumph over the adversaries of liberal democracy. There are varying claims as to how the present bugle of triumph will blow. While very few dare to challenge the liberal-democratic model, the signs of disaffection with present institutions are rapidly surfacing. The basic argument for the disaffection is that people feel that traditional parties in a liberal democratic setup have ceased to take the interests of the people into account, and that extreme rightwing parties are making inroads into many Western liberal democracies. In this paper, I want to show that, moreover, even among those who are resisting the call of political leaders seeking popular support by exploiting people's desires and prejudices and not entering discursive discourse, as proposed by Deliberative democracy, there is a marked scepticism about politics and politicians, which is undermining popular democratic values. There is clearly a wave of opposition emerging in most liberal-democracies, which exposes the triumphalism witnessed after the collapse of Soviet Union.

Democracy is one of the most emerging and significant concepts of the twenty first century contemporaries world. Democracy is that, where it says different ways of good governance and its outcome is that in today the different countries have followed to move from non-democratic to democratic political governance systems. Before we talk about democratic governance and any study of democratization, it will be confusing to us without knowing what democracy is, and what are the minimum environments that have to be found in a democratic government? I have broadly studied about democracy then I have found that various kinds of democratic institutions and the socio-political thinkers, philosophers about democracy and they have developed their own ideas and they give on how we should identify with the term 'democracy' and under which situations a government or states or nations can be called democratic. Since the earliest period of time, the Greek word '*Demokratia*' and to the French word '*Democratie*', and after that to English word 'democracy', has been used with different objectives for the purpose of political regimes. Although the Greek word '*Demokratia*', traced from the root words '*Demos*' which means 'people' and the words '*Kratos or Xratos*', which means 'rule', therefore '*demokratie*' referred to the rule by the people, which nowadays applies to the liberal representative government. As a matter of fact, democracy is a legitimate political system that has been not for all time envisaged this method but rather democracy is a moderately new fact in today's world politics.

Therefore, according to the Encyclopaedia of Democracy, the definition of democracy is that

Democracy is a system of government in which all adult persons within the unit of rule are entitled to participate equally in making general laws and policy. Each of the elements within this and most other definitions will require further specification. In the

course of such elaboration most theories go beyond description and definition to some statement of democratic ideals. (Lipset, 1995, p.1278)

Therefore, the exclusion in Athenian democracy of both slaves and women resulted in social inequalities. The modern liberal democratic system with its economic structure that allows accumulation of wealth maximizes power and opportunity in the hands of a few that ends up with disproportionate inequalities. Further, through a historical analysis of democracy from ancient Athens to contemporary states reflects defects in the claim to justice and fairness, egalitarian system, ideal political system that places equality at the core of society while benefiting the least well-off in the society. The realised defects of the system that has come to be known as Liberal democracy led thinkers and philosophers to find alternatives either as an extension, supplement or improvement of the theory, like with Deliberative Democracy, or suggestion of replacing the fundamental organization of society, like in Radical Democracy. Deliberative democracy is not a single hypothesis but is presented through many different explanations and justifications. However, the basic idea between the variants is to provide a strong account of political legitimacy. In a democracy, the legitimacy of collective decisions is the will of the majority. However, Liberal philosophers, like Tocqueville (2000) and Mill (1978), have questioned the principle of majority and have argued that this may end up in the 'tyranny of the majority' which sometimes unfairly restricts the availability of liberties to the citizens belonging to a minority. In order to avoid this unfair restriction political thinkers of Deliberative democracy propose problematisation of the liberal account of the legitimate collective will.

Therefore, democracy constitutes the system in which people become conscious of their rights and dignity. The main

purpose of democracy or the aim of a democratic government is to manage justice among the people, as well as to guarantee the basic rights of people such as freedom and equality. In Mill's socio-political thought, utilitarian structure of values of democracy becomes meaningful only in the light of his deliberations on the concepts of justice and equality. Mill says that for any society to be held truly democratic, then there must be hold these two goals of democracy because their realization enhances both social and political freedom. Mill says that any state that does not hold more liberty to its individuals, then it is said to be more just like that which does not, and any democratic form of government which helps us in achieving these ideals of justice and equality, then these type of democracy is said to be practicing ideal democracy.

Today's political discourse, especially among the political philosophers and theorists, demonstrates that the liberal democratic governments have failed, both theoretically and practically even with the notion of participatory democracy. Classical Liberal democracy failing in its endeavours required new forms of justification and operation. Deliberative democracy is the latest effort to justify Liberal democracy, while admitting the failure of classical Liberal democracy. Deliberative democracy presents the thesis that

...democratic decision making ought to be grounded in a substantial process of public deliberation, wherein arguments for and against laws and policies are given in terms of whether they advance the common good of citizens and the justice of the political society. This conception is to be understood by contrast with interest-group pluralist and elitist conceptions of democracy. While many have proclaimed adherence to the idea that public deliberation ought to play a major role in democratic society, few have offered a clear account of the significance that deliberation has for democracy. (Christiano, 1997, p. 243)

In Deliberative democracy, emphasises is on dialogue and deliberation, which describes the position of Gutmann and Thompson. Both of them affirm that, the controversial moral issues would not be expelled from public debate, but these issues become a subject of collective deliberation. According to Gutmann, a liberal state should be

...dealing with moral conflict. The consensus on these higher order principles that liberal propose is not sufficient to eliminate moral conflict from politics, and a more robust set of principles is necessary to govern the conflict that inevitably and legitimately remains. The higher order principles that constitute the core of the consensus, we suggest, must permit greater moral disagreement about policy and greater moral agreement on how to disagree about policy. (Gutmann, 1990, p. 125)

The phrase "Deliberative" was first used in 1489, to refer the political discussion within a small and limited group of political leaders. Then in the eighteenth century, deliberation was part of a protection of political representation that pointedly resisted appeals to popular judgment. Edmund Burke's "Speech to the electors of Bristol," which declared that "Parliament is a deliberative assembly," is famously to a defence of an administrator conception of representation that today seems more aristocratic than democratic (Burke, 1959, p.115).

Most essentially, the deliberative democracy insists that the need to justify decisions which made by citizens and their elected representatives. Both are expected to justify the laws which they would act out to one another. Deliberative democracy, which makes the room for many other forms of decision-making including bargaining among groups and secret operations ordered by executives, as long as the use of these forms themselves is justified at some point in a deliberative process. In this democracy, the first and most important characteristic is its reason-giving requirement. In deliberative democracy, agents receive part is by presenting and responding to reasons, or by demanding that their representatives do so with the aim of justifying the laws under which they must live together. The reasons are meant both to produce a justifiable decision and to express the value of mutual respect.

Therefore, deliberative democracy is that process where people and government representatives aims at producing a decision that is binding for some period of time. In this process the deliberation is not like a talk show or an academic seminar. In this process, the participants do not argue for argument's sake and they do not argue even for truth's own sake although the truthfulness of their arguments is a deliberative virtue because it is a necessary condition to aim in justifying their decision. They intended to their discussion to influence a decision the government will make, or a process that will influence how future decisions are made better for society or state. Amy Gutmann notes that deliberation,

...may sometimes increase moral conflict in politics by opening up forums for argument that were previously closed ... Deliberation encourages people with conflicting perspectives to understand each other's point of view, to minimize their moral disagreements, and to search for common ground, but it begins by opening politics up to a range of reasonable disagreement that is restricted by less deliberative politics. (Gutmann, 1999, p.199)

While deliberation aims at a justifiable decision, it does not assume that the decision at hand will in fact be justified, let alone that a justification today will do for the indefinite future. It keeps open to the possibility of a continuing dialogue, firstly in this situation citizens can condemn the previous decisions and secondly they move ahead on the basis of that criticism. Although a decision must stand for some period of time, because it is temporary in the sense that it must be open to challenge at some point in the future.

Cohen's model of deliberative democracy is strongly normative in character and is partly grateful to Habermas's discourse the theory of democracy. The significance of such a normative theory of deliberative democracy for our present purposes is that it well spokes the conditions under which a fair debate among competing collective identities and conflicting conceptions of the good can be conducted. Cohen's theory of deliberative democracy embodies all normative theories tend to do an ideal model of fair deliberative procedures, but its explicit aim is to investigate ways in which to institutionalize such an ideal. So as to make our social and political institutions more open to free public deliberation. It is not an ideal thought-experiment, but an attempt to work out the fairest conditions for the conciliation of conflicting moral perspectives on the common good. Finally, the ideal of deliberative democracy is

not a perfectionist doctrine, since it does not depend on a particular view of the good life. Rather,

It is organised around a view of political justification that justification proceeds through free deliberation among equal citizens- and not a conception of the proper conduct of life. (Cohen, 1989, p.27)

The most complicated theoretical account of a deliberative model of democracy is provided by Jurgen Habermas. Like Cohen, Habermas offers a description of an ideal deliberative process whose normative validity rests on the following criteria: firstly, processes of deliberation must take the form of an exchange of information and arguments backed by reasons; secondly, deliberations are comprehensive and public, no one may be excluded in principle and all those affected have a right to take part; thirdly, deliberations are free of any external or internal force that could detract from the equality of the participants; fourthly, deliberations aim at rationally motivated agreement and can in principle be continued indefinitely or resumed at any time. However, political deliberations must be brought to a close by majority vote given the institutional pressures to reach a decision. Since it is internally connected to a practice of deliberation, majority rule justifies the assumption that the decision adopted may be considered acceptable until further notice, namely, until the minority convinces the majority of the correctness of its own views; fifthly, political deliberations expand to all those matters that can be regulated in the equal interest of all, including matters, such as the unequal distribution of resources, that affect the equal and effective exercise of the right to participation in the political process; sixthly, political deliberations, must also include the interpretation of needs, the articulation of collective identities, and the transformation of pre-political attitudes and preferences. (Habermas, 1996, pp.305-306)

It is easy to see how deliberative democracy is based on a re-interpretation of the possibility of universalism in democracy. To the traditional Marxist-socialist projects, universalism arose from the universality of the agent of change: the proletariat was the revolutionary subject due to its place in the relations of production. Habermas and the other deliberative thinkers avoid pointing out privileged positions from where universality can be ensured. But they maintain the very idea of reaching universality, namely through the 'force-less force' of the better argument in the ideal speech situation. From a post-foundational perspective, that the idea of the force-less force and the very possibility of reaching rationality appear doubtful. When translated to democratic theory as in the case of deliberative democracy two sets of problems appear. The first is that consensus is unlikely, and should it be achieved it is not rational. The second is that the combination of the belief in rationality through agreement and the weakening of the demand of general or broad participation easily lead the protagonists of deliberative democracy into an aristocratic position.

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Even though Habermas in his latest writings appear to have renounced on the demand for consensus as well as the possibility of rationality in the strict sense, but there is no doubt that rationality stills functions as some kind of regulative ideal and that democracy in the last example is preferred because it is a social order which allows for the closest approximations of this ideal. According to Seyla Benhabib for example, one of the central issues to be addressed is how the articulation of the common good can be made compatible with the sovereignty of the people. In her view, the main challenge confronting democracy today lies in reconciling rationality with legitimacy. She puts it in the following way,

According to the deliberative model of democracy, it is a necessary condition for attaining legitimacy and rationality with regard to collective decisions making processes in a polity, that the institutions of this polity are so arranged that what is considered in the common interest of all results from processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals. (Benhabib, 1996, p.69)

As Mouffe has pointed out on several occasions, the problem with the ideal of rationality is that it blinds us to the use of power and exclusions inherent in any process of decision. On a first, immediate level is quite clear that consensus and agreements is not the dominant picture of politics in modern societies. Of course deliberative thinkers argue that this is a sign of illness and that need to be cured and that it can be cured under the right circumstances. If actual decision making was organised according to the principles of deliberative democracy, then consensus would be the result. However, on a more philosophical level, the problem is whether decisions can be made rationally, and without any use of force. If this is not the case, the very idea of rationality as the aim of democracy is problematized.

To conclude I would like to say that, since we never reach the point of universality, neither by an agent pre-disposed for the task, or through putting up situations like the ideal speech situation, we will always have to choose and decide between alternatives. No matter how well the debate has been formed, decisions making involves the exclusion of alternatives. Even in the probably very rare cases of unanimity a minimal amount of force i.e. power, has been involved, namely the power it takes to 'suppress' alternatives that cannot be reduced to 'errors' in an algorithmic calculation. As Laclau puts it, this leads to the conclusion that democracy is not about making power disappear, but rather to shape power in accordance with the democratic principles of equality and liberty.

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