

Review of: "Thinking and Acting "Within the Box" and Thinking and Acting "Outside the Box": "Deliberative Democracy" and the Model of Scientific Brainstorming Groups"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Peer review of Thinking and Acting "Within the Box" and Thinking and Acting "Outside the Box": "Deliberative Democracy" and the Model of Scientific Brainstorming Groups

First, the paper is truly "out of the box": engaging, relevant, and courageous.

Also, the topic of this study is interesting and intriguing.

Second, the important aspect is whether the courageous ideas proposed here are sustainable. Even from the abstract of the paper, especially intriguing is the phrase "However, even though democracy involves all kinds of non-specialized groups of population, it is superior to the highly specialized groups of scientists just from an epistemological standpoint." It is a very strong affirmation and difficult to support exactly because it is phrased to indicate the *epistemological* superiority of decisions taken by non-specialized groups of scientists via brainstorming. The idea is, at the same time, of great interest, and it is important to see how this affirmation can be sustained. If the arguments are convincing, in my opinion, they would be precious against the contemporary elitist critical wave about limiting the rights of vote of certain "not enough educated" categories of citizens, which is undemocratic and rather dangerous.

In the first part dedicated to the definition of deliberative democracy, we are introduced to the opposition between "scientists" and "partisans". I reckon the "scientists" would contribute a more well-argued, well-founded, and complete vision of the world, while the "partisans" come to the table with an interested, biased, and partial image. This opposition seems not to sustain or be in contradiction with the idea selected and emphasized above. In the next paragraph, the prerequisite characteristics of the human beings suitable to engage in deliberative democracy are considered "absurd". Then, what would the reasonable requirements be? The author does not say, and by the end of the paragraph, we are left with the conclusion that "*democracy can be but dialogical, deliberative,*" an idea that I, for one, cannot reasonably oppose. One may argue, as Habermas did, that they are "ideal" requirements setting an "ideal communication and interaction situation," but not "absurd." The next paragraph introduces the ancient image about ontology extended into the image of democracy, where the "source of advice or ideas" is that "gave only rational, thus true/good/beautiful directions." Again, these directions are rather perfect for setting the best possible situation for deliberative democracy. Nevertheless,

we understand that the author intends to emphasize the *idealist* and *essentialist* underpinnings of deliberative democracy as open for debate and criticism.

The critical insight of the author correctly emphasizes the intrusion of authority within the social and political interactive activities, deforming the ideal status of deliberative democracy and leading to a different type of political praxis, with a “lower” status, which is “collaborative democracy”. Indeed, the interests of the private and public, of the more powerful and the less powerful, often collide (see antagonistic democracy in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 1987), where the authors argue that the class struggles “moved” more at the discursive level), however, noticing this does not eliminate the communicational, dialogical, deliberative dimensions of the more “realistically” and prosaically perceived democracy. On the one hand, one cannot have a “tripartite commission of the state, the employers’ representative structures, and the trade unions” unless there is dialogism and deliberation. Otherwise, there is a perfect monologue and dictate of the Big Brother. On the other hand, at the normative level, we have democratic legislation protecting the dialogical and deliberative dimensions of “prosaic” democracy. The part about the inequality of participants and the promotion of arguments conducing to realities such as “symbolic violence”, “disinformation”, “disorientation”, “confusion” as a result of the imposition of the Only Truth is clear as the reproduction of the structures of power in the capitalist logic. Yes, democracy is *in principle* deliberative, but this principial quality is not left floating in high poetic and idealistic spheres. Within current democracies, this principial deliberative-ness of democracy is sustained by democratic laws, democratic rights, democratic mechanisms based on the separation of powers, and the main democratic instruments still available for “the people” – vote, petitions, gatherings, demonstrations, activism. By the virtues of critical evaluation and thought and of the freedom of consciousness and expression, fake polls and *ad hominem* arguments can be exposed as what they are – false and incorrect inserts in democratic life. This is not to minimize the power of propagandistic Truth and Authority, but to remind us of the competitiveness of criticism, public exposure, problematization, and speaking the truth, on which both professional journalism and democratic life count. Indeed, “Deliberative democracy’ was characterised by the existence of independent associations, free access to information, transparency, the dialogical principle of responding with arguments to the opposed idea/argument, and the organisation of the procedure of deliberation. From this standpoint, it was compared with the scientific acknowledgement of truth.” It is true also that given the complexity of reality, the independent associations could be infiltrated and detoured, free access to information could be quasi-cancelled by poor-quality information and disinformation, and that transparency is rather mimicked than actual.

As shown in the “Management of democracy” section, collaborative democracy is not consultative democracy, and people often feel that they are not well-represented; but this result (poor representation) has to do as much with the processes of social reduction to a common denominator in the social and political dialogical deliberative processes as with the fact that the mandate of representatives concerning the interests of the people represented is not documented *en detail* as a point of reference for a true accountable process of their activity bearing real consequences, as much as it has to do with the derailment of the mandate toward personal interest or corrupt interests of “other” interests than those of the people represented. Here are the important aspects pertaining to how democracy should be brought closer to the ideal deliberative democracy model. *Regarding the comparison with the scientific acknowledgement of truth in a group of*

researchers, consequential (that is, bearing concrete consequences for the representatives and authorities) supplementary measures ensuring the transparency, accountability, and responsivity of the representatives and the standards of the quality of information would be the counterparts of the methodology and procedures from scientific activity.

We completely agree with the author: technocracy and social engineering implemented by the elites mean the annihilation of democracy.

Very important are the considerations about the worldview, logical mind, and fear, showing that in scientific activity, as in a technocracy, specialization does not automatically lead to the truth. Nevertheless, I consider it important to emphasize a subtle aspect: in scientific activity, the procedures and methodologies are much more precise than in any democratic process and activity. They are worlds apart. In the latter, the notion of reliability is unheard of, and it may be a good idea to think about how we could translate this concept into the democratic sphere of activity without damaging or limiting the freedom of action, association, consciousness, and speech (expression).

I want to call attention to the fact that “think tank” research and scientific research are quite different things, comparable only at a superficial level. The former is a type of more rationalized, argument-based biased thought and, often, an elegant front for propaganda and PR “research.” A discussion would be important and interesting, but I have to leave it for another time for obvious reasons.

Science is a service, yes, like politics and debate. In this respect, we need to raise awareness more on the fact that we tend to mythicize science, seeing it as an activity above all activities. It is just yet another human enterprise, better situated methodologically, procedurally, etc. As in science, it is important to acknowledge the presuppositions and hypotheses, so it would be in the dialogical democratic struggles, and we should remind people and restate that calling out the presuppositions and hypotheses of the discourse opponent is a good democratic deliberative (or, broadly, communicational) strategy.

As a remark, the use of the word “just” is not often the best choice for the point the author wants to make. For instance, in the phrase “But science is based just on “cultural conflicts” whose greatest worth is just their generative power of *criticism*,” either as “only” or as “precisely,” the word “just” is not the best choice for “Science is based *just* on ‘cultural conflicts’,” because science is based on numerous things, and to emphasize the most important one, the best term is possibly “mainly.” And at the same time, when thinking about what is foundational for science, paradigmatic and worldview clashes come after a more priority level consisting in methodological and procedural activities conducted for reproducible results.

Also, “the scientists *do not need* to be bought...” by the powerful of the day, as the author points out, but they *are* in several occasions, and often they make it in subtle but nonetheless wrong and bearing disastrous consequences for democracy and scientific legitimacy alike (See various studies on coded bias, on biased research via financing, or even Leonardo DiCaprio’s *Don’t Look Up*).

Yes, “the infatuation of certain intellectuals that only they could comprehend the functioning of society and democracy” is unsustainable. Even more, everyone is very much interested to understand democracy and society as well as possible as this understanding imminently impacts his or her life. A truth that goes too many times unspoken and even concealed is that often people are accused of incompetence when they do not vote or sustain the officially sanctioned interest. The author’s conclusive idea that “the democratic model means also the *emphasis and strengthening of the general public competency and means to exert it*” is valid and extremely important. We cannot overpass the stage of the need for continuous qualitative substantial democratic education for “a social organization based on *both specific professional competency and a high social competency of the entire population*” and a serious attention to the procedural, legislative, rule of law, and human rights pillars of democracy is vital to ensure a democratic polyphony and not “a cacophony of voices”. An overall analytic view discerning between substantive and procedural democracy may be useful.

Indeed, as the author rightly shows, the democratic deliberative “box” is often “bigger” than the paradigmatic “box”, definitely more chaotic and complex. *The elites definitely think in their “box,” which is not first and foremost specialized, but first and foremost interested. Placing their interest first as more important than everyone else’s via a sophisticated subordination of their competence to the service of their interest, or, serving their interest as a specialized and competent view, elitism and technocracy display a dangerous potential for unethical lack of professionalism.* In my understanding, this is what the author meant by “However, even though democracy involves all kinds of non-specialized groups of population, it is superior to the highly specialized groups of scientists just from an epistemological standpoint” in the abstract. If this is the case, the cited idea should be clarified and nuanced to this end.

Other ideas, enunciated as well in the abstract, such as the idea that “both the institution of science and the coagulated groups of researchers were considered in the dominant ideology of the last century as opposed to democracy”, are simply untenable, at least at this general level of the affirmation. Who argued and based on what that democracy was opposed to the institution of science and to the groups of research, or the other way around? Within the text, there are no arguments to support that, and no references to specialized literature in this respect, and in my view, this is untenable.

In the end, I want to point to the possibly obvious aspect that I took the time to review this paper because it is very much topical and worth reading and pondering upon.

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