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Deliberative Democracy in Populist Times

Challenges, Risks and Potential Solutions

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Abstract

In times of rising populism, this paper aims to study if deliberative democracy and deliberation in general, can function as a counteracting tool against populists movements. By discussing perspectives of both sides of the deliberative democratic debate, the paper illuminates both beneficial factors and potential drawbacks of the deliberative form of democracy when it comes to counteracting populism.

By arguing that deliberation and deliberative theories, on paper and in theory, has a great amount of potential in battling extremism, polarization, and division, the paper stresses that for deliberative democracy to regain its legitimacy and reach its full potential, a set of favorable conditions must first be fulfilled for the deliberative process to be effective and function properly. Without fulfillment of these favorable conditions, the paper concludes, the risk is imminent that an opposite effect of deliberation could emerge, which will most likely tend to undermine the true meaning of its main principles, feeding populism rather than counteracting it.

Keywords: Deliberative democracy, deliberation, populism, democracy, Habermas

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“Political democracy exists and has existed in a variety of circumstances, even if it is most commonly sustained by a limited cluster of conditions. To understand more fully the various conditions under which it has existed may make possible the development of democracy elsewhere. Democracy is not achieved by acts of will alone; but men's wills, through action, can shape institutions and events in directions that reduce or increase the chance for the development and survival of democracy. To aid men's actions in furthering democracy was in some measure Tocqueville's purpose in studying the operation of American democracy, and it remains perhaps the most important substantive intellectual task which students of politics can still set before themselves.”

- Seymour Martin Lipset (1959, p. 103).

1. Introduction

In times of significant dissatisfaction with the current forms of representative democracy, mainly expressed through the rise of populism, citizens and political theorists tend to turn their eyes to alternative democratic theories to find potential solutions to the current democratic crisis. One such alternative, which this paper aims to discuss, is Jürgen Habermas's theories of deliberation.

Habermas's idea of deliberative democracy gained high levels of recognition during the '90s and onwards. However, in later years, his deliberative and rational theories seem to be forgotten or even considered irrelevant in the discussion of potential answers to the problems of democracy. This paper intends to go the opposite way, aiming to refresh Habermas theories and deliberative democracy in general, and critically study if it has any answers to the current rise of populism.

The paper will take its standpoint arguing that deliberative theories do have effective solutions to the rise of populism. But only under certain premises and only in theory. For deliberation to function properly, certain conditions, such as a general condition of equality, must thereby first be fulfilled. Otherwise, the risk is imminent that its theoretical potential gets undermined. This paper will therefore critically study deliberative theories, not to reject them as future solutions to the rise of populism, but rather as a way of illuminating its flaws and problems, in order for deliberation to reach its full theoretical potential.

The main aim of this essay is thereby to study if deliberative democracy, its theories and ideas, are to be considered effective in the sense of counteracting populism. By asking questions about how deliberative theories have any answers to the current rise of populists movements, the discussion of this essay will illuminate its solutions and critically ask questions about its effectiveness and relevance in a political landscape dominated by rising populism, irrational politics, and post-truth beliefs.

1.1 Essay-question

The main question for this paper will thereby be:

Could deliberative democracy be a solution to the rise of populism?

1.2 Clarifications to the aim of the discussion

Note that the main task for this essay is not to choose sides in the current democratic debate, rather it should be regarded as an attempt to bring clearness and to critically study different theories from both sides of deliberation, with the aim to discuss alternative solutions to the contemporary condition of liberal democracy.

To bring clearness in the deliberative terrain, opposing perspectives and theories to deliberative democracy will be discussed, focusing on both beneficial factors and drawbacks as a way of concluding deliberative democracy's effectiveness in the question of battling populists movements. The paper will argue that deliberation and deliberative theorists are indeed effective in the question of battling populism, but only under the right conditions, and only in a context of favorable circumstances.

Deliberative democracy has scientifically, under fair and correct conditions, a great amount of potential in the question of battling populism, decreasing polarization, curb division, and promoting rationality (Dryzek a.o, 2019, p. 1145). Its main problem however concerns the question of how a future form of deliberative democracy may be implemented. Deliberative theorists have, in this question, few or even no answers to this major problem.

This fact may be an explanation for why deliberative theorists in large numbers only discuss deliberation and deliberative democracy in abstract terms and not with a practical perspective of their ideas. Instead, the general argumentation from the deliberative democratic field seems to be that once we have found solutions to the implementation- issues of deliberative democracy today, nothing is stopping deliberation from reaching its full theoretical potential.

This paper will argue the opposite. By strongly criticizes deliberative theorists' incompatibility to critically study and understand potential risks of their own theories and the deliberative process. Arguing further that if deliberation takes place under unfavorable conditions and circumstances, such as a high level of income inequality or discrimination and prejudices among participants, deliberation might face the risk of undermining its true potential. This means that the potential being proven in theory and in concrete science would be useless.

To clarify, the aim of this paper is not to directly study the problem of implementation, the framework of this paper is to be considered too limited for such a study. The paper will instead discuss deliberative theories like deliberative theorist's do themselves: as if deliberative democracy already existed in reality and as if it was already implemented in our political system.

1.3 The relevance of this paper

This paper is to be considered relevant for two reasons. The first reason is scientific. The discussion of this paper is being built on previous work reaching all over the political and democratic field. The paper thereby contributes to science by bringing new perspectives to the scientific democratic discussion. By discussing potential solutions to the crisis of democracy, even though not finding a final solution to all its problems, this paper can help develop knowledge on what democratic alternatives that are to be considered realistic in the future and not. In the question of deliberative theories, it can help illustrate the problematic issues which deliberative theorists have great concerns acknowledging themselves.

The second reason regards society in general. Ordinary citizens have the right to know what alternatives that are available to them in the question of how to structure democracy. Especially in times when major dissatisfaction with the current democratic system is on the rise. The populist breakthrough is therefore a good enough indicator that this paper, and others like it within the democratic field, is to be considered relevant and important in the jungle of science.

Because, one cannot deny the threat of right-wing populism when it comes to maintaining liberal rights and principles. But right-wing populism hasn't appeared out of nowhere. There are always, most reasonably, roots to the problems of society. The political debate, however, tends to believe that democratic problems and phenomena appear out of nowhere. As if they were not grounded in something bigger and more complex than the problem itself. Right-wing populism is in this sense not an exception. Neither is deliberative democracy.

The discussion, however, especially among democratic theorists, is rather grounded in the question of what roots are resulting in what conditions, and why. One of the main tasks in the field of political theory is therefore to discuss solutions, not only to the problems themselves but also to the roots creating them. This is and if not, should be, the case even in the contemporary debate to the current state of democracy. Consequently, this will thereby also be one of the main purposes for the coming discussion of this paper.

2. Deliberative democracy and its solutions to populism

2.1 A brief presentation of Habermas theories

In his most influential work *Between Facts and Norms* (1992), Jürgen Habermas explains his deliberative democratic theories, arguing that the future structure of democracy should focus on the ideal of deliberation. Suggesting that the deliberative form of democracy can and should be implemented, not only in the sense of individuals participating in debates but also at the institutional level (Habermas, 1998, p. 340-341). Habermas ground mechanisms and norms for the deliberative form of democracy rests on some main values, meaning that arguments should be based on rationality..The result would be that different parties should meet the opponent, not to convince the other or to compromise, but to seek consensus in politics (ibid, s. 341).

2.2 Habermas deliberative principles

Habermas also draws attention to Joshua Cohen's theories of deliberation and his set of principles that need to be addressed for the deliberative process to work properly (ibid, p. 305-306). These principles discuss and demand citizens' right to participate in debates and decision-making through the concept of deliberation. Cohen argues that all who wish to speak their voice and argue for their views should be able to do so on equal terms. Further, he argues that no one who wishes to participate should be excluded. Like in Elster's theories, rational arguments should function as the main entrance to the deliberative process, and decisions should be made mainly based on the best argument (ibid). Beyond that, the rational principle will work as a general theme, not only in the arguments being brought up during the deliberative process but also in the agreements themselves. Cohen stresses that decisions between different parties should be rationally and mutually agreed (ibid).

Moreover should deliberation and the deliberative process be free of any “external coercion”. This means that the participants of the deliberative process are sovereign and only bound to the rules of communication and to the arguments being delivered during the deliberative process itself. Deliberation should not only be free from different external coercion, deliberation should also be free of any “internal coercion” that could undermine the equality of the participants.

Resulting in that each participant has an equal right to contribute to the deliberative process, to introduce topics, views, and arguments, regardless of who the participants are. To accept or reject proposals should thereby be uncompetitive based on the best argument (ibid, p. 305-306).

Further principles, or “additional conditions”, that Habermas is discussing, regards the importance of rationality and to acknowledge the equal interest of all participants. This means that no topics should be privatized or excluded from the discussion. Furthermore, should deliberation be grounded on the principle of changing “pre-political attitudes and preferences”, which would result in a “consensus-generating force” (ibid, p. 306).

2.3 How deliberation can counteract populism, polarization, and extremism

It is scientifically shown that deliberation is effective in the sense of decreasing polarization, counteracting extremist views and beliefs, and battling populism (Dryzek a.o, 2019, p. 1145). It seems that in deliberative forums, or under deliberative circumstances, participants get less extreme and more open-minded to opposing perspectives. Furthermore, deliberation creates a place for citizens to acknowledge their rational mind, making their arguments more well-considered. This results in the participants accepting and acknowledging new opinions and values, which are discovered first after some time of reflection (ibid).

Pointing at the case of Eastern Europe, Silvia Suteu argues that to counteract populism,, deliberation may be the way forward. Suteu points to the fact that to strengthen institutions’ legitimacy in the eyes of the people and to stop the feeling of alienation from normal citizens against the political process, deliberative processes should be considered an effective tool in reaching these goals (Suteu, 2019, p. 518).

Suteu has scientific facts defending her claims. John Dryzek and Joshua Cohen among others have shown that deliberation can decrease polarisation between different ethnic, religious, and ideological groups. Deliberative processes are also favorable in the question of healing deep divisions between citizens and uniting different groups and beliefs just by making them discuss their problems (Dryzek a.o, 2019, p. 1145). Referring to the successful examples of Bosnia, Colombia, Belgium, and Northern Ireland among others, Dryzek shows that properly made deliberative processes promote recognition, understanding, and learning (ibid).

2.4 Has Habermas changed his mind?

In later years, however, it seems that Habermas has changed his mind. In an interview from 2016, surprisingly with the title named by Habermas himself: "For A Democratic Polarisation: How To Pull The Ground From Under Right-wing Populism", he argued for a renewed formation by the political left to fight economic inequalities, the unregulated global capitalist system and the threat of right-wing populism. He asked himself and the rest of the democratic left, why social democratic parties haven't built a stronger formation against the phenomenon which Habermas considered a threat against the democratic system (Habermas, 2016).

Habermas asks important questions as to why social democratic parties haven't been more active in the creation of a new political frontier against the capitalist system. He argues that the social democrat's main problem concerns its acceptance of rising economic inequalities, the new "third-way" form of social democracy, and its reproduction of neoliberal reforms. As a consequence of this, Habermas argues, it is not surprising, especially not when the traditional parties haven't been "proactive" in facing the problems of its citizens, that politics tend to switch over to more irrational and expressivist forms like the tactics of populist movements (Habermas, 2016).

The new position of Habermas is interesting because it symbolizes his change of opinions regarding what is to be considered the way forward for liberal democracy to regain its legitimacy. Furthermore, his statements create a direct contrast to his original theories being based on deliberative forms of democracy, meaning less of conflict and more of consensus.

The creation of this new frontier which Habermas nowadays seems to be in favor of will most likely face resistance from the capitalistic system and political parties of the right, and thereby create a new battleground for a new hegemonic formation in global politics. A hegemonic formation which Chantal Mouffe, also considered one of the most active critics of Habermas deliberative theories, for years has anticipated being the way forward.

However, even though Habermas is anticipating different strategies now from what he acknowledged in his initial theories, the discussion will still focus on his original work. In the arguments against his original theories of deliberation, however, the discussion might use older Habermas as a way of criticizing the younger.

3. Democracy, populism and post-truth politics

3.1 Is liberal democracy going through a crisis?

Liberal democracy is struggling. One could even argue that liberal democracy is in a crisis, not only in the sense of legitimacy or representation but for multiple reasons. To define contemporary democracy as a state of crisis is not a completely obvious definition to make, however. Some would argue that this kind of alarmism is destructive and reduces the ability to think rationally and to find potential solutions. Such a way of reasoning would conclude that the representative form of democracy will most definitely be the dominant concept even in the future. Others ground their argumentation in the belief that what we are witnessing is not a crisis of democracy, but capitalism. They also mean that the discussion about democracy in crisis is just a glorifying nostalgic view of the neoliberal post-democratic state (Kalyvas, 2019, p. 387).

This paper refuses both of these theories and argues that liberal democracy as we know it today, with its fundamental institutions and principles, is facing threats that might challenge its existence. The argumentation for this standpoint is, and should not be either, too complex. As Malte Frøslee Ibsen acknowledges, the rising support of right-wing populism is in itself a good enough indicator of the crisis of liberal democracy throughout the western world (Ibsen, 2018, p. 805).

The rise of right-wing populism, however, has been an ongoing phenomenon for decades now. It has shaken the bulwark of politics by its roots and changed the political landscape radically since its first entrance on the global scene. In France, the right-wing party Front National and its leader Marine Le Pen managed to reach the second round of the presidential election of 2017 and was thereby the only competitor left to challenge Emmanuel Macron for office (Kriesi, 2018, p. 53). In Germany, the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland is under surveillance by the domestic secret police for its extremist views (Rinke, 2021). In Poland and Hungary, the right-wing parties have held office for years and are now frequently rolling back democratic rights (Csaky, 2020, p.1). And in 2021, the US Capitol, also referred by many as the heart of liberal democracy, was stormed by supporters of the sitting President Donald Trump, who himself, most remarkably, urged the storming (Fisher, 2021).

3.3 Populism and post-truth politics

The rise of right-wing populism and its values goes in direct contrast to what Habermas meant must be the conditions that need to dominate the debate for deliberation to work. Especially in two of Habermas's most important principles: the principle on a deliberative process based on equal citizens and the norm of inclusion, and the rational principle of arguments (Habermas, 1998, p. 305-306). Beyond that, can one not count on populist leaders to accept the principles of deliberation. They will most likely seek conflict in a more antagonistic way, rather than seeking consensus.

But what is populism? And how is it connected to the phenomena of post-truth politics? There are different definitions regarding the meaning of populism. Some political theorists define populism as an ideology itself, others like Michael Freedon, has in his morphological approach of studying ideologies, considered populism to be too "thin" in its core values to be acknowledged as one and thereby incapable of function on its own (Moffitt, 2020, p. 15).

Regarding the question of populism and its definition, populism will in this discussion not be considered as an ideology, rather just as a strategic approach to politics. The essay will share Michael Freedens but also Ernesto Laclau's definition of populism, being what Laclau referred to as a "discursive strategy" with its main goal to divide society into two camps, mobilizing the "underdog" against the elites or the ones in power (Mouffe, 2019, p.11).

Populism and its connection to post-truth politics, however, is a bit more complicated. In his most influential book "Post Truth. The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back", Matthew D'ancona explains the relation between populist movements and their leaders and the phenomena of post-truth politics. D'ancona argues that the new political landscape sets emotion before rationality, creating diversity by using nativist rhetoric and referring to liberty as a tool of implementing autocracy. In addition, D'ancona means that politics is being perceived as a "zero-sum game", rather than a battle between political alternatives. Science, he adds, is seen as something suspicious rather than trustworthy and is sometimes even met with contempt (D'ancona, 2017, p. 7-8).

Examining The characteristics of Donald Trump and his 2016 presidential campaign as well as the Brexit referendum, these symbolic themes of the contemporary political landscape can all be found. In research being made to fact-check arguments, both during Trump's presidential

campaign and the Brexit-campaign, untrue arguments, misleading slogans, and non-facts statements were dominating the rhetoric (ibid).

4. The question of favorable conditions

The following part of this essay will have its main purpose in discussing if deliberative theorists, their ideas and solutions, have any answers to the current crisis of liberal democracy and the rising support for right-wing populists. The structure of the discussion will be divided into different topics which are relevant for the essay question. During the topics-discussion, arguments and perspectives from both sides of the democratic debate will be considered, discussing both positive and negative perspectives on deliberative democracy's answer to the rise of populism.

4.1 The need to create favorable conditions

If we, like Dryzek and others have shown (2019, p. 1144-1146), are to believe that deliberation has (under fair and favorable conditions) great potential in the question of counteracting populism, the major concern is not dependent on whether deliberation is effective or not. Rather, the great concern regards how to create optimal conditions for deliberation to function in the best possible way. Deliberative theorists are often right in their acknowledgments that the deliberative process is effective in the question of decreasing polarization and extremism. The problem, however, that they largely lack answers to, regards the problem of creating favorable conditions.

This paper argues that the following section is vital in understanding deliberation and its future potential in battling populism. The following discussion will therefore indirectly argue, in line with Sander's (1997) critique of deliberation, that in order for deliberative democracy to be the bulwark against populism -which science has proved it to be - a critical perspective of its contemporary possibilities to function is urgently needed.

When Lynn M Sanders argued against deliberation in her most famous work "Against Deliberation" (1997), she brought perspectives to the democratic debate which few before her had summarized in such a straightforward way. Sanders is, however, not to be confused with the similar critique being made by Chantal Mouffe or Ernesto Laclau. These are to be considered the direct opposite to deliberation, arguing that deliberative democracy does not have any answers to the rise of populism. Sanders is more open minded in her critique, seeing a future potential in the deliberative process and its ability to broaden democracy. By criticizing deliberation at its roots, she also brings out the potential in its core, indirectly arguing that if deliberative theorists are to

solve problems, they must first critically acknowledge deliberative problems themselves. This is especially important in the contemporary political landscape, not least in the question of battling populism.

4.2 A revolutionary idea?

Deliberative democracy may seem like an easy concept to establish. It should be considered not, however. The fundamental idea of a deliberative form of democracy requires great changes in the conditions of society in general and in people's living conditions in particular (Fung, 2005, p. 397). This means that in a potential future form of deliberative democracy, the political focus must most reasonably change in a more egalitarian direction to create favorable conditions under which deliberation effectively can grow.

To acknowledge that the current flaws of our contemporary political landscape, such as global economic inequalities, racism, or populist politics is detrimental for the deliberative process is not a new perspective. Lynn M Sanders (1997), cleared the terrain early on this matter. The question which deliberative democracy therefore must answer takes its main ground in how these conditions may be fulfilled, and in a further perspective, be upheld. If not, and if deliberative democracy takes place without favorable conditions such as a general principle of equality, the risk is that the deliberative ideal will become contradictory and eventually undermined. In the question of populism, there is a risk that a situation of unfulfilled conditions will make deliberation benefit populism rather than counteract it.

Some theorists go even further than just pointing at the obvious problems of implementation, arguing that deliberative democracy is a revolutionary idea, which in itself urge for a different democratic system. This new system would not just change the way we organize our societies, but would most definitely demand big-scale reforms in the current political system, the argumentation goes (Fung, 2005, p. 397).

Archon Fung, a deliberative theorist, and professor at Harvard University (2005) makes important notes when asking how deliberation can be accomplished under unfavorable circumstances, such as a high level of income inequality or systematic domination. Even though Fung stresses important perspectives on an eventual implementation, his solutions to the problems of the current unsatisfactory conditions are uncertain.

Fung argues for a deliberative type of activism, taking inspiration from civil disobedience, and points out that even though the deliberative form of democracy requires changes in systemic conditions which could be compared to the scale of revolutionary levels, deliberative activism is not a revolutionary form of concept (ibid, p. 402 - 403).

Influenced by reformism in general, deliberative activists instead call for reforms that would change the way we view distributive resources. They are calling for an exchange of resources from the top to the bottom of the redistribution scale to create more fair conditions under which deliberation can thrive. To create these conditions, activists, politicians, and others should work within the system, urging for reforms that would create more favorable conditions for deliberation in general. Fung further argues that a deliberative activist should only use other methods than the deliberative one when deliberation is exhausted on all its possibilities to create change (ibid, p. 403).

There is nothing wrong with the acknowledgments being made by Archon Fung. This paper intends to share a majority of his ideas pointing to the fact that the current conditions of our societies aren't favorable, and that a change must be realized before a potential realistic deliberative implementation can be done. What this paper disagrees with though, is the way forward for this reality to become a fact. It is to be considered naive to believe that these changes and conditions can be accomplished within the system, especially under the form of deliberation itself.

To summarize, there are still questions that need to be addressed for a deliberative democracy to bloom: If the way towards a deliberative democracy goes by the method of deliberation itself, then the problem of unfavorable conditions, most reasonably, would not exist? More concrete, in such a case would this discussion not even be worth mentioning. Reasonably because the favorable conditions that we lack today, would in such a world already be a reality and deliberation would most reasonably be the straightforward solution to a majority of our contemporary problems. But it's not, however.

Besides this, remains the problem that by going the deliberative way to implement a deliberative form of democracy, the risk is once again imminent that this would lead to nothing more than a slower implementation, or that an eventual implementation would be done under unfavorable conditions, which would most likely reproduce the same politics if once again

referring to Dani Rodrik (Ibsen, 2018, p. 805), which fed the populist movements in the first place.

4.3 Fulfilling favorable conditions

Habermas deliberative theories have historically been criticized for ignoring matters that concerns economic questions and social inequalities (Morelock - Ziotti Narita, p. 144). This could be an explanation to why deliberative theorists, in general, devalue the importance of favorable conditions. This is to be considered problematic. Because one cannot find solutions without first acknowledging existing problems. The following chapter will therefore discuss potential risks with a deliberative process that are ignoring different dimensions of economic and social equality.

One of the more important critiques being made by Sanders, especially in the question of counteracting populism, concerns the elitist and conservative structures of the deliberative process (Sanders, 1997, p. 348). Which deliberative theorists too often, are unable or unwilling to acknowledge. The incapability to acknowledge deliberative risks, Sanders argues, leads to a naive positivism of deliberative democracy, making deliberative theorists blind against the negative and elitist structures of deliberation (ibid).

Sanders is not the only one criticizing deliberative theorists for disacknowledging eventual consequences of deliberative theories. Other theorists mean that Habermas and others in favor of deliberation, are too concerned with the problems, dilemmas and imperfections of progressive processes today, rather than focusing on the dangers of regression (Xingfu, 2019, p. 75). A combination of both of these phenomenon, could one argue, would potentially create a destructive democratic cocktail where too much of a pessimistic attention is focused on the problems concerning how to reach progress, rather than agitating for progress itself. During the time, populists will most likely argue for a regressive democratic politics that will frequently role back progressive and liberal rights.

Because of the conservative and elitist nature of deliberation, deliberative theorists have no answer to the problems of common people, and thereby no, Sanders means, answers on how to break with different forms of political status quo's (Sanders, 1997, p. 348). This perspective is problematic, especially when discussing how some citizens might be excluded from the

deliberative process because of their lack of knowledge on how to make rational arguments and to convince others in rational ways (ibid, p. 349).

Sanders' arguments go in line with Schumpeter's (1942) discussion about rationality. What differs the both, however, is that Sanders believes that ordinary citizens can develop the capability to make rational arguments when essential social conditions are fulfilled. But how does one fulfill these conditions? If or not fulfilled, what difference does it make in the question of battling populism?

At first, we can acknowledge that if deliberation will work like Habermas and Cohen also have stressed, some kind of equality must be realized between the participants. Sanders points out that those who can not deliberate “properly”, would most likely be the ones who already are marginalized in society in general. Namely poor, people of color, women, and materially disadvantaged people (ibid, p. 349).

Beyond the problem of structural inequality and discrimination, if these citizens feel unseen or marginalized even in forums of deliberation, then they would most likely turn their backs on the deliberative and political process. Worth mentioning is that these groups, especially the poor and materially disadvantaged, already, in large numbers, sympathize or are to be considered in the risk zone of voting for populist parties. Arguing that if the deliberative process is unable to create favorable conditions, these groups would be unable to deliberate properly and thereby also miss to participate in the deliberative process. Resulting in that they would miss out on the positive effects of deliberation and its positive effects of counteracting polarization ((Dryzek a.o, 2019, p. 1145)).

And even if individuals within these groups would have the ability to make rational arguments, Sanders argues, they would still be marginalized because of general prejudices circulating the public debate (Sanders, 1997, p. 349). This is to be considered problematic out of two perspectives: Firstly, such a situation would most likely increase the feeling of alienation from the political process from already disadvantaged and marginalized groups, and in a longer perspective, increase the contempt against the “political elite”. This will, most reasonably, gain populist parties.

Secondly, if these groups are excluded from the deliberative process before even entering, their perspectives, problems, and views will never be discussed properly. Meaning that only well-educated, individuals who are economically powerful and advantaged, and individuals with

an ability to discuss rationally, will decide which topics to deliberate about. Which in itself, directly or indirectly, would most likely, only reproduce current beliefs of the current hegemonic power, which in our contemporary landscape would be neoliberal views and beliefs. This would mean that in a longer perspective, deliberation will mostly lead to reforms that would benefit already economically advantaged citizens and their class, rather than ordinary people. This is to be considered destructive in the question of battling populism and decreasing polarization.

In addition, to break with prejudicial structures and to reach favorable conditions, society, in general, would require an increasing level of information and enlightenment-reforms, directed to the public citizens. This is to be considered hard to achieve especially in times of rising economic inequality throughout the western world, and even more problematic in a political landscape dominated by populists politics.

Sanders, though influenced by other deliberative theorists, may have an answer here. What Sanders and other opponents of the deliberative form of democracy are arguing for instead, would most likely increase state expenditure, especially in countries with a non-developed welfare system, such as the US. Referring to Rogers and Cohen (1983), who is agitating for welfare-reforms as a solution, especially in the areas concerning education and social care. This was to be considered as an attempt to fulfill the conditions of equality in a variety of forms (Sanders, 1997, p. 353). Without this, Sanders argues, it is uncertain if deliberative democracy can be qualified as democratic at all (ibid, p. 353-354).

But fulfilling these needed conditions would mean a change in the level of political conflict. This could be the motive even for Habermas when arguing for an increasing conflict between opposing parties of the political spectrum, stressing that traditional social democratic parties should higher their ambitions in regulating the global financial system and focusing on breaking the neoliberal domination instead of conforming to it (Habermas, 2016).

Habermas acknowledgments of the importance of winning back “traditional social-democratic fields” (ibid), illuminates important notes. If deliberation should function in its best possible way, which Habermas himself is well aware of, general economic inequalities, as already mentioned, must decrease. It seems that one way to do so, which Ibsen also has shown (2019, p. 796), is by bringing back the legitimacy of the welfare state. Because neither neoliberal politics nor populism, if interpreting Habermas, can accomplish such a radical decrease in

economic inequalities that are urgently needed if deliberation will function properly and fulfill its needed conditions.

Still, in a utopian world, where all conditions are to be fulfilled, it seems, however, that this itself would not be enough. Because, beyond the importance of favorable conditions, questions remain that need to be addressed to connect our discussion and find solutions to the contemporary political landscape of today. This concerns epistemological matters.

Sanders refers to what she calls “equality in epistemological authority”, meaning citizens' ability to accept, respect, and acknowledge opposing arguments (Sanders, 1997, p. 349). Reconnecting to the risk of citizens being prejudicial in advance, namely that some people reject other people's arguments before they're even spoken, epistemological equality is being built on the idea of mutual respect (ibid). The principle of mutual respect gets further problematic when adding it to the light of a populist political landscape. Because, how do one deliberate with those who will not accept the principles of deliberation? How can one convince populists to agree upon the principle of mutual respect? If it's not to be considered impossible, it is indeed a complex problem to solve.

5. The question of representation, rationality and hegemonic structures

5.1 The problem of representation

When the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe was about to finish the introduction to her book "On the political", she used a quote from Machiavelli to show her critique against what she meant was the deconstruction of "the political":

"In each city are found these two different desires...the man of the people hates being ordered and oppressed by those greater than he. And the great like to order and oppress the people.

Mouffe describes our contemporary political landscape as a direct opposition to Machiavelli's statement. She means that global politics "has entered a new era", where the antagonistic structure of politics has been erased. A development which, Chantal Mouffe argues, could jeopardize the future of democratic politics (Mouffe, 2005, p. 7).

Mouffe criticizes the rational forms of liberalism for ignoring the dimensions of collective identities and their importance for the vitality of democracy. When archaic passions between different group identities disappear and get replaced by individualism and rationality, society gets less prepared, Mouffe means, to deal with phenomenons like nationalism (ibid, p. 6). Further, she argues, that when democracy limits itself to establishing compromises in politics, or as Habermas' theories to deliberate about the common good rather than establishing contesting political alternatives, it disacknowledge peoples true desires and political passions (ibid).

But is political consensus only leading to erasing the true meaning of politics, contributing to the rise of extremism in a variety of forms? Or could deliberation work indirect opposite, functioning as the bulwark to extremism rather than its cause?

The answers are different depending on who one decides to asks. The deliberative theorist Silvia Suteu acknowledges the critique being made by Mouffe, and argues that in a political system, without oppositional alternatives which erases the political sphere of politics, a crisis of representation develops (Suteu, 2019, p. 497). This development creates opportunities for populists, calling themselves the only main opposition against the current political establishment (ibid, p. 498).

What separates the two, however, is that Suteu views deliberation as a way of strengthening representation, rather than weakening it. Suteu refers to how parties in the last decades, both on the left and the right, have embraced neoliberal reforms without having a deliberation about what the policies will mean for the affected societies in general (ibid). Suteu thereby means that to stop unpopular propositions and reforms, a deliberative process should be established to find a solution that benefits all. Contrary to that claim, Mouffe would argue that what is needed is not a deliberation about neoliberal policies and their consequences, but what society needs is a contrasting alternative with a clear and counteracting form of politics .

However, one of the more important arguments that Suteu discusses, is the symbolic value of the deliberative process. Deliberation can in this sense function as a signaling tool, communicating that there are different alternatives to the irrational forms of populist politics. And that the deliberative process including ordinary citizens, sends important signals, underlining that the citizens themselves are the key characters in the development of *their* societies (ibid, p. 508).

In the question of how these theories would be implemented into practice, Suteu is flexible in the creation of a deliberative form of democracy. She means that it would not matter if the deliberative concept becomes a reality within the current democratic system, meaning a broadening of democracy in a deliberative direction, or if states create new institutions dealing with deliberative forms of representation. In either way, she argues, both forms would help to counteract ordinary citizens' feeling of alienation from the political process, which she means creates possibilities for populist leaders to gain support (ibid, p. 518).

5.2 The risk of reproducing hegemonic structures

Even though there is a great amount of symbolic value in the deliberative process, there are still other concerns that might undermine its legitimacy. The arguments in this question are grounded in the fact that deliberative democracy and its defenders do not take into account underlying structures of society and how deliberations are likely to reproduce these. Just as Rousseau acknowledges: "*If the people are seduced by private interests which some few skillful men succeed by their reputation and eloquence to substitute for the people's interest. The public deliberation will be one thing, and the general will another thing entirely*" (Sharon, 2018, p. 369). If people are seduced by a few who are operating in their interests, then the deliberative

process would become nothing more than a reproduction of the will of a few and not the general will of the affected citizens or the general population as a whole (ibid).

In the paper “Populism and democracy: The challenge for deliberative democracy” (2018), Assaf Sharon discusses how citizen’s ability to govern themselves is of great concern in the discussion of different forms of deliberation. Starting in John Dewey’s (among others) theories of the control of public opinion, Sharon expresses the same concerns that Rousseau once acknowledged (ibid, p. 368).

One of Dewey's main arguments regards Rousseau’s concern about citizens' lacking capability to form their own opinions. In Dewey's view of the human being, people are irrational and ignorant, and therefore incapable of establishing individual views and opinions on political matters. But this is not to be considered the biggest problem the really dangerous part, which should be considered the most relevant argument in the question of deliberative democracies’ reproduction of structures, concerns the fact that citizens are manipulable (ibid).

From Dewey's perspective, the deliberative form of democracy would not, reasonably, change society in any notable way. Rather it would just reproduce the current perspectives, structures, and opinions that are dominating the contemporary political landscape. In the question of representation, the deliberative form of democracy risks to just benefit those who have the resources great enough to influence the deliberative process, according to Dewey. If he is right, the fundamental idea of the deliberative form of democracy be compromised, just like Sharon acknowledges himself (ibid).

The other potential risk of the deliberative process concerns the participant’s ability to self-government. Again, Sharon refers to Dewey who means that:

“The smoothest road to control of political conduct is by control of opinion. As long as interests of pecuniary profit are powerful, and a public has not located and identified itself, those who have this interest will have an unresisted motive for tampering with the springs of political action in all that affects them” (ibid).

Even though Dewey is not directly discussing deliberation in particular, but rather discusses the urgency for people's right to enlightenment in different forms, his perspective on people's ability to govern themselves asks interesting questions about the deliberative form of democracy. Let’s take capitalism as an example: If economic forces, with clear economic interests in creating capital, see an interest in doing so by affecting the deliberative process, then why would they

not? In the last sentence, Dewey points towards an interesting note. Those who have an interest to steer the public opinion will most likely try to do so, and the most effective way to influence the public's mind in a potential deliberative form of democracy is most reasonably through the deliberative process.

Dewey's theories of capitalism and its frequent interest-seeking go in line with imperialistic theories of global capitalism and its urgency to seek new markets to avoid bankruptcy because of fierce competition from other global companies. The idea is that once global capitalism, once it hit the limits of profit in the western world, would find new areas to gain capital in the colonies and developing countries. Dewey's acknowledgment of capitalism and its profit-seeking symbols the potential risks with a deliberative form of democracy. The risk is imminent that the deliberative process would rather gain the interest of a few in the form of the economic forces, rather than the will of the people.

It gets even further problematic when adding theories discussing the roots of the rising support for populist parties. Following Dani Rodrik's theories, the rising support for populism is in general grounded in economic terms. Rodrik means that when people experience an increase in economic insecurity, the likelihood to vote for populist parties increases (Ibsen, 2019, p. 798). Rodrik refers to "the losers of economic globalization", arguing that even though populists win their vote by channeling their rhetoric against migration and the more cultural part of politics, the underlying factor for their support springs back to economic reasons and increasing levels of economic inequalities (ibid).

There is a potential risk that if capitalist forces manage to steer the deliberative process, deliberation would rather produce the same structures and agree around the same politics that is to be considered the main cause, if referring to Rodrik, to why populism is on the rise. In this case, would deliberation not be viewed as a solution in the question of counteracting populism.

Rather would these potential risks, both in the case of Dewey and Rodrik, undermine what Habermas meant must be the main principles for the deliberative process to function properly (Habermas, 1998, p. 305-306). Beyond the question of who's will that will be expressed during deliberation, both the principle of rationality and the question of inclusion will potentially be undermined. If these principles are unfulfilled or compromised, the deliberative democracy has a hard time reaching its full potential.

In the question of the deliberative democracy's potential risk of reproducing hegemonic structures, Chantal Mouffe makes interesting notes when arguing that Habermas's ideas of decision-making are problematic in the context of the general opinion of the public debate. She means that even in an ideal deliberative process, where deliberation fulfills the principles of equality between the participants, the fulfillment of favorable conditions has no major effect in battling inequality between the affected participants (Mouffe, 1999, p. 748).

Additionally, Mouffe argues, that the higher the level of equality, the more open and impartial deliberation is, the higher the risk that the guidance of the better argument will be based on generalizable opinions dominating the public debate (ibid). Mouffe is partly right here because what we tend to believe is the "best argument", will most likely go in line with the general mind of the public opinion. In this case would the "better argument" not be the best, rather just an argument that fits the participants' own opinions the most.

Though Mouffe is overwhelmingly pessimistic here, her arguments are still not irrelevant: Because, as Dewey and Sharon also acknowledges, if people are not enlightened enough, the arguments they believe to be their own, is nothing more than a mirror of the public debate in general and an expression of underlying hegemonic structures in particular, and can thereby not be considered as an expression of self-government.

5.3 The question of rationality and the will of the people

As already mentioned in Habermas deliberative principles, for deliberation to work properly, there must be some common ground and shared values on which the deliberative process can rest. One of these is the principle of rationality (Habermas, 1992, p. 305-306), a principle that often tends to clash with the general will, or opinion of the people.

In his most famous work, "Capitalism, socialism and democracy", Joseph A. Schumpeter (1942), criticizes the representative form of democracy to be untrue to the conditions of life (p. 269). Even though Schumpeter on a more general stage is advocating for another form of democracy, ranging far from both the deliberative form and far from the basic principles of liberal democracy, his theories are still important to discuss. Not least, the theories are of value in the question of rationality, the individual's capability to self-government and the common will of the people.

One of Schumpeter's primary arguments concerns the fact that assertion, especially when frequently repeated, weighs more heavily in the question of attracting voters than rational arguments do (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 258). This can be viewed as a partly important factor, among others, to why populists gain support from the electorate. As commonly known, populists - in direct contrast to the deliberative form of democracy - present easy solutions to complex problems.

While applying Schumpeter's theories to populist tactics, we can not reasonably rely on the assumption that populists will adopt the principles of deliberation and rationality. The risk thereby exists, that in a future implementation of a deliberative form of democracy, traditional parties will continue to seek rational arguments and deliberation as the main way forward. This, while populists will continue to agitate in irrational ways, having easy solutions to complicated questions. If following Schumpeter's theories, populists will most likely continue to gain votes, just by proposing the opposite to the rational form of politics, and opposite to those parties who argue in rational ways.

Other areas concern the irrational structure of capitalism. The political theorists Veith Selk and Dirk Jörke acknowledge in their article "Back to the future! Habermas, and Dewey on democracy in capitalist times", that capitalism in itself isn't rational. Neither is capitalism free of norms or to be considered as a stable economic system. Instead, Selk and Jörke argue, is capitalism "normatively infused", "irrational" and "rather (a) turbulent capitalist economy that is deeply interwoven with politics" (Selk - Jörke, 2019, p. 46). In this sense, if capitalist interests manage to influence the deliberative process, the arguments or agreements would not be particularly rational, nor would they mirror the public opinion.

On the other hand, deliberative theorists could ask who says that capitalist interests will manage to succeed in a hypothetical "plan" of affecting the deliberative process? Daniel Gaus, Claudia Landwehr, and Rainer Schmalz-Bruns (2020) answer and criticize Selk and Jörke's arguments by arguing that the rise of populism would be a consequence and a reaction to the neoliberal post-democratic order. They mean that these arguments have only one major effect, and that is to reproduce populist's irrational politics and their destructive narratives of the people against the elite. Wanting a more antagonistic strategy to the rise of populism is not only dangerous for society in general but has a direct undermining effect on the ideals of deliberative democracy (Gaus a.o, 2020, p. 336-337).

As already mentioned, deliberation and deliberative processes can have a great number of positive effects in the question of counteracting polarization and manipulation. In addition, deliberation promotes the capacity for people to make rational decisions (Dryzek a.o, 2019, p. 1144). Furthermore, deliberation among citizens shows great efficiency in the question of battling populism (ibid, p.1145). When different groups of people come together to discuss and to deliberate over important and complex issues, deliberation creates rational decisions and brings out values and arguments which the participants, after some time of reflection and deliberation, did not promote before the process of deliberation began (ibid).

A good example of this, which the deliberative theorist John Dryzek, among others, also has referred to, concerns a populist proposal of the part-time legislature with part-time pay in California. The proposal, which initially had a great amount of support from the public, lost an enormous amount of recognition after some time of deliberation (ibid, p. 1146).

The problem, however, even though deliberation scientifically has great effects in declining polarization and counteracting populism, remains critical because of the obvious fact that the deliberative process only includes, and fits small groups at a time. Furthermore, as Dryzek and others among him acknowledge themselves, the effects shown in science are not easy to achieve. He argues that good deliberation takes a great amount of time and effort to succeed (ibid, p.1146). Through this perspective, it does not matter how effective or rational deliberation might be because when it faces the restrictions of reality, there is a risk that the deliberative process takes too much time and energy from the affected citizens. Hence, they could be likely to reject the concept rather than welcoming it.

The following question will thereby be: is there time for democracy and its citizens to wait for deliberative processes to find rational solutions to the urgent problems of their everyday life as well as - in a more democratic sense - to counteract populism? There is a risk, like in Schumpeter's discussion about rationality (Schumpeter, 1942, p 258) that one half of the citizens acknowledges deliberation, regardless of time and effort, while the other half does not. This cleavage is to be considered risky in the aspect of curbing division and counteracting polarization.

And if referring to Chantal Mouffe, the rational answer to such a question is simply no, since what she calls the “populist moment” has already arrived, creating space for a new hegemonic

formation. This new hegemonic formation can either be authoritarian or democratic (Mouffe, 2018, p. 45), meaning that if we wait too long, it might be the former rather than the latter.

6. Future research within the deliberative democratic field

This paper has in large parts only discussed potential risks of deliberation. It has intended to bring different perspectives to the effectiveness of deliberative theories, trying to illuminate their flaws for deliberation to reach its full potential. Future research concerning deliberative theories should thereby, most reasonably, focus on how to minimize these risks and deliberative theorists should, as a result, ask themselves how to find counteracting tools against the problems surrounding the deliberative democratic field. One potential future research question could be the welfare state's importance for the deliberative process in the question of fulfilling favorable conditions. Another area of concern worth studying regards implementation. This is an area where deliberative theorists have few answers, especially the question of how a deliberative form of democracy may be implemented on a bigger scale than what is considered realistic today.

Another area for future research could concern deliberative democracy and its general possibilities of future implementation in developing countries. Ilan Kapoor takes ground in the debate between Habermas and Mouffe and criticizes both of them for being too focused on the framework of the western world (Kapoor, 2002, p. 460). Arguing further that the dissatisfaction seen in western democracies is not only a Western or European phenomenon. Rather, since liberalism and liberal democracy has been spread effectively in the last decades, major dissatisfaction with democratic institutions has occurred in developing countries as well (ibid, p. 459).

Such a study should ask itself if it is to be considered easier or more difficult to implement a deliberative democracy in developing countries compared to the Western world. This is an attempt to conclude if a future implementation is easier or more difficult to achieve in countries where democracy has been a part of the political system only for a short period of time.

7. Conclusions

It seems that deliberative theorists have a hard time adapting to the current rise of populism. Even though deliberation on paper has great potential in the question of counteracting populism, division, and polarization, deliberative theories, and deliberation in general, are still not unproblematic. Put in the context of reality, its solutions and potential answers are too uncertain in their effectiveness to be considered as a natural answer to the illiberal politics of populist movements.

On the other hand should deliberation and deliberative democracy not be entirely excluded from the discussion of potential future solutions to the current rise of populism. Deliberative theorists have scientific claims and facts defending their theories and should thereby be taken as a serious and important actor in the current democratic debate.

However, there are important questions to answer for deliberative democracy if it is to regain its legitimacy. These questions regard the areas of creating favorable conditions as a way for deliberation to reach its full potential. For this to happen, the global political landscape would reasonably need to store itself in a more egalitarian direction, decreasing economic inequalities and strengthening minority rights. These areas are not easy problems to solve, however, and raises demanding questions regarding deliberative democracy and its future strategies.

Further conclusions to draw concern deliberative theorists' important work of creating deliberative processes that will live up to Habermas principles. Especially the ones concerning internal and external coercion. The most important task is thereby to make deliberation free of pressure from actors having a future interest in intervening with the deliberative process. If not, there is a potential risk that the deliberative process would not mirror the will of the people in any noticeable way and that the process only will deliberate about topics that are beyond the concern of normal people and their everyday struggles.

Consequently, this concludes that before an eventual implementation of a future form of deliberative democracy can take place, it is substantial for the future deliberative democratic debate to fulfill the necessary conditions. This fact is crucial for deliberation to function in its most effective way and to live up to its theoretical potential. Otherwise, there is an imminent risk that deliberation backfires, feeding populism rather than counteracting it.

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