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Abstract

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Democratic Legitimacy: Discursive Practices and Normative Order

Today it is common knowledge that legitimacy is indispensable for every well-functioning and sustainable political system. It seems beyond question that political legitimacy has become very close conceptually to democratic legitimacy. The call for *Bringing Democracy Back In* (Alexander, 2006) has been expressed and increasing attention has been directed at it. Since this is an idea which is socially and politically significant, and it has become highly meaningful in connection with processes of “democratic transition”, sociological contributions to democratic theory related to this are to be very much expected. What has been termed “The New Legitimacy Discourse” has made legitimacy a fashionable and much used term both in political rhetoric and in the media. What can be said to have begun in Habermas’s *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus* (1973) as part of an analytical approach of legitimation has evolved further, democratic legitimacy now being a conceptual part of what is referred to as the deliberative democracy movement.

The aim of this paper is three-fold. First, it is to discuss current sociological theories and conceptions of democracy and democratisation, as well as of legitimacy and legitimation, in regard to their normativity. Secondly, it is to discuss and also defend the view that democracy and legitimacy have become conceptually interdependent in normative theories of democracy.

Thirdly, in a concluding section, different influential proposals of a philosophical and epistemological character concerning democratic legitimacy are examined (Benhabib, 1996; Estlund, 2008; Rosanvallon, 2010). The Rawlsian liberal principle of legitimacy is considered here in relation to other contemporary forms of normative order.

Keywords: democratic legitimacy, democratisation, legitimacy, legitimation, epistemic democracy, normativity