

REVIEW

Review Essay: Deepening Deliberative Democracy— Experimentation vs. Naturalization

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Ana Tanasoca, *Deliberation Naturalized: Improving Real Existing Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Hélène Landemore and Ana Tanasoca have recently proposed two different approaches to deepening the deliberative dimension of democracy. In *Open Democracy* (2020), Landemore introduces a novel paradigm of democracy—open democracy—which grants ordinary citizens access to an actual exercise of political power through innovative forms of democratic representation. In *Deliberation Naturalized* (2020), Tanasoca develops a naturalized normative theory of deliberative democracy which stresses the role of citizen deliberation in what she refers to as ‘naturalistic’ settings, i.e., the public sphere. Both texts invite us to stretch our imaginations of how contemporary democracy can be deepened in deliberative ways.

The Problem of Democracy

Both Landemore and Tanasoca start with discussing the problem of democracy. Landemore is concerned about the fundamental flaws in the original design of representative democracy. More specifically, its premises on electoral representation and the protection of individual rights are unable to empower all citizens equally, such that genuine popular rule remains a mirage. This is not only suboptimal to the ideal of democracy but also contributes to the frustrations in citizens who make use of elections and referendums to voice against the system per se rather than for the common good. Such populist movements are bringing about a global recession of democracy and even the rejection of democracy altogether (Landemore 2020: chapter 1).

On the other hand, Tanasoca zooms into how deliberative democracy is practiced in the real world. She points out that there is by far too much attention to deliberations in small-scale, artificially organized settings performed by a limited number of representatives. These include deliberations in the formal political structure (e.g., the legislative, executive, and judicial) as well as in other

organized deliberative events (e.g., the mini-publics). Such artificially engineered deliberations are unlikely to produce genuine democratic deliberations due to their insufficient inclusiveness, unequal participation, inadequate exchange, and/or lack of sincere motivation. The overemphasis of these pseudo-deliberations restricts our understanding as to how ordinary citizens can deliberate with each other in the public sphere (Tanasoca 2020: chapter 2).

Landemore’s solution: open democracy

Open Democracy contains the following structure:

1. Landemore first examines the crisis of representative democracy and the myth of direct democracy (chapters 2 and 3). The major purpose is to demonstrate the restrictive conception of representation in representative democracy and why direct democracy fails to serve as a feasible and normatively desirable response to the crisis of representative democracy.
2. In the core theoretical chapters (chapters 4 and 5), Landemore conceptualizeslottocratic, self-selected, and liquid representation and defends their normative credentials in relation to democratic legitimacy.
3. In the subsequent chapters, Landemore theorizes open democracy based on the five institutional principles (chapter 6), illustrates these principles of open democracy through the real-life case study of the Icelandic constitutional process (chapter 7), and defends open democracy as a feasible and desirable model of democracy (chapter 8).
4. Towards the end, Landemore outlines how open democracy can be expanded for global democratic institutions as well as democracy within private firms (chapter 9).

Central to Landemore’s proposal is the idea of experimentation. She considers a list of experiments in democratic innovation conducted around the Western world in the past few decades. In particular, she focuses on three deliberative experiments; namely, the constitutional redrafting in Iceland, a crowdsourced policy process in Finland, and the Great National Debate in France. Landemore suggests that these experiments demonstrate how democratic institutions can be redesigned to align with the democratic goal of popular rule. In addition, they also serve as an empirical foundation for an idealized model of democracy – open democracy (chapter 7).

Open democracy is a new paradigm of democracy that includes novel forms of democratic representation through which political power is made equally accessible to all ordinary citizens. Inspired by the freedom and self-organization on the Internet, the concept of openness comprises both the spatial and temporal dimensions. It means that the democratic system is, respectively, open to people and ideas and is open-ended for change. In this way, citizens are guaranteed of the right to participate in law-making at any time they want, such as initiating laws when they are dissatisfied with the legislative agenda of the elected representatives. Moreover, democratic institutions are also adaptive and revisable such that they must change whenever citizens wish them to change (chapter 6).

Realizing open democracy requires a mixture of various forms of representation that allow ordinary citizens to be in charge. To Landemore,lottocratic and self-selected representation are authentically democratic because citizens have equal opportunities to become representatives, while the former's combination of sortition and rotation ensures that political institutions are accessible over time, the latter ensures that the institutions are spatially open to anyone who is willing and able to join. Landemore also suggests a third kind of representation—'liquid' representation—which lowers the entry barriers to becoming electoral representatives, although it is relatively less democratic than lottocratic and self-selected representation (chapters 4 and 5).

As a new paradigm of democracy, open democracy is underpinned by a set of core institutional principles and conditions, namely: participation rights, deliberation, majoritarian principle, democratic representation, and transparency. Landemore treats these principles and conditions as not merely evaluative standards for existing democratic institutions but also as abstract while practicable guidelines for picturing the specific institutional arrangements for open democracy. While the design choices may vary based on trial and error from experimentation, Landemore proposes that, ideally, open democracy should incorporate the institution called 'open mini-public' which is:

A large, all-purpose, randomly selected assembly of between 150 and a thousand people or so, gathered for an extended period of time (from at least a few days to a few years) for the purpose of agenda-setting and law-making of some kind, and connected via crowdsourcing platforms and deliberative forums (including other mini-publics) to the larger population (p. 13).

It is worth noting that, even at the ideal level, open democracy does not require citizens to participate in decision-making. Unlike participatory democracy, citizens are free to delegate the task to representatives selected by lottocratic or other means, but should they wish to participate instead, they can decide how much and how often they would like to do so at any point in time. This model guarantees citizens of their participation rights while leaving them flexibility as to when and how to activate such rights (chapter 6).

Tanasoca's solution: naturalized deliberation

Naturalized Deliberation consists of the following structure:

1. Tanasoca first suggests that there are limitations to democratic deliberation in the formal political system, but such pseudo- or symbolic deliberation might promote genuinely deliberative ends elsewhere within the deliberative system (chapters 2 and 3).
2. Next, Tanasoca considers three types of mechanisms for deliberative democracy, namely, mechanisms of how individuals weigh arguments and reasons in internal deliberation (i.e., micro-micro relationships, chapter 4), mechanisms of how individuals deliberate together, and how their opinions are fed back into the deliberative system (i.e., micro-macro relationships, chapter 5), as well as how citizens' deliberations are shaped by the public spectacles (i.e., macro-micro relationships, chapter 6).
3. The last three chapters are dedicated to proposing ways to overcome some principal barriers to networked deliberation in the public sphere. Tanasoca discusses why political polarization does not impede informal networked deliberation (chapter 7), how deliberative intervention can be designed to fix the problem of pluralistic ignorance (chapter 8), and finally, how the problem of message repetition can be tackled (chapter 9).

In contrast to Landemore, Tanasoca's response to the problem of democracy is not at all about experimentation but naturalization. By naturalization, it means that deliberative democracy should be understood as a naturally occurring rather than an 'artificially engineered' process. To Tanasoca, it is misguided to equate deliberative democracy with deliberative experiments, because democratic deliberation does not merely exist among the selected participants in these experiments. Quite differently, democratic deliberation is already being practiced by ordinary citizens in the civil society on an everyday basis, and these informal, unadulterated interactions result in what Tanasoca refers to as 'networked deliberation' (chapter 1).

In this sense, Tanasoca would not regard the list of deliberative experiments discussed by Landemore as the only or major sites of deliberative democracy. That being said, Tanasoca in no sense rules out the use of organized deliberative events, but they should be valued only instrumentally for improving the deliberative system as a whole. In this way, deliberation is naturalized (chapter 3).

Networked deliberation is the central idea in Tanasoca's argument. It speaks of the mechanisms that connect deliberation at various levels and sites in a deliberative system, such as micro-level and macro-level deliberation as well as deliberation in the formal political sphere and civil society. Here, mechanisms are the 'cogs and wheels' linking the interrelated parts in a system, such that they contribute to producing certain behavior and consequences of the system. In the context of deliberative democracy, these

mechanisms enable different components and processes to interact with each other as well as to work together to shape the outcomes of the deliberative system (chapter 5).

Tanasoca aims to develop a mechanism-based account for the already practicing deliberative democracy in the real world. This enables us to make sense of how democratic deliberation can take place at the systemic level. There are several mechanisms in a deliberative system:

Situational mechanisms explain *macro-micro* relationships, with the individual being exposed to a particular social situation that in turn affects her behavior. *Belief-formation* mechanisms... are of this kind. *Action-formation* mechanisms are located at the individual level and explain how individual states generate specific actions (*micro-micro*). Finally, *transformational* mechanisms connect the *micro* and *macro* levels—they explain how a number of individuals interact with one another and how their combined actions give rise to collective outcomes, intended or unintended (p. 17, Tanasoca's emphases).

Tanasoca believes that the above mechanisms can be used to analyze all changes in the processes and outcomes of a deliberative system. The overall performance of the deliberative system, hence, depends on the quality of interactions between actors within these mechanisms. If we expect the entire system to deliver good outcomes, one possible approach would be to boost the performance of certain mechanisms within the system, such that it compensates for any sub-optimal performance elsewhere. Given that deliberative interactions are already occurring spontaneously across society, Tanasoca contends that we should acknowledge this 'naturalistic' background condition and focus our attention on enhancing these interactions within the deliberative system (chapters 3 and 5).

Contributions

Both Landemore and Tanasoca have advanced the existing literature on deliberative democracy by extending the debate on three recurring themes in the field:

1. Should the effects of deliberative politics be scaled up with the focus on mini-publics or networked deliberation?
2. How should the desirable qualities of deliberative democracy be assessed?
3. How can the normative theorizing of deliberative democracy be sensitive to empirical deliberative politics in the real world?

Scaling up

Although Landemore and Tanasoca understand the problem of democracy differently, one unifying theme of their projects is the concern about how deliberative democracy can be deepened. After all, a recurring puzzle in the debates of deliberative democracy remains as to how, on the one hand, more people can be engaged for

democratic deliberation and how, on the other hand, the effects of such deliberation can be scaled up (Niemeyer & Jennstål 2019).

Landemore is interested in advancing structured deliberative events which can simultaneously engage a vast number of participants. This is done through experimenting with various deliberative innovations with the help of new digital technologies, such as crowdsourcing platforms as in the case of Iceland. On the other hand, Tanasoca rejects the idea of creating any artificially engineered, structured deliberative events as such. She reminds us that informal networked deliberation has been naturally occurring in the public sphere. To deepen deliberative democracy, we should instead set our sights on the entire deliberative system and examine how the various mechanisms in the system can be enhanced.

Put another way, both Landemore and Tanasoca are aware of the importance of scaling up deliberative democracy. Landemore focuses on how deliberative events can be made more inclusive and accessible to ordinary citizens, while Tanasoca focuses on how the already existing deliberation among citizens can be improved to boost the performance of the entire deliberative system. In short, Landemore is more concerned of whether citizens can participate in *formal* deliberative institutions, whereas Tanasoca sees that citizen deliberation does not have to take place in formal institutions but is already ongoing in the *informal* public sphere.

Landemore and Tanasoca invite us to consider a new perspective into the question about how we should scale up the effects of deliberative politics, should we invest time and energy creating new institutions for more experimentation or leaving deliberation 'naturalized' by linking up the already existing deliberation?

Normative principles

Another contribution concerns the refinement of normative principles for assessing deliberative democracy. For Landemore, she specifies a combination of five core principles for evaluating and recommending deliberative institutions. These principles require that: (1) citizens are granted individual participation rights beyond formal political rights, such as citizens' initiative ('participation rights'); (2) citizens are able to collectively make some key laws based on deliberation and majority rule ('deliberation' and 'the majoritarian principle'); (3) citizens are democratically represented through means such as lottery and self-selection ('democratic representation'); and (4) the process is transparent ('transparency'). Landemore refers to these principles as 'mid-level institutional principles', meaning that they are neither too abstract nor too specific, which are just good enough for informing the design of deliberative institutions (Landemore 2020: chapter 6).

In a similar vein, Tanasoca also lays out three desiderata for appraising the performance of informal networked deliberation. First, 'inclusion' demands that all citizens be indirectly included in public deliberation through their social-qua-communicative ties. Second, 'feedback and reciprocity' requires that deliberation be a dynamic and

interactive process with every participant speaking and responding to each other. Third, 'equality' requires the communicative networks to be balanced such that people have equal opportunities to participate in, and have equal influence over, the deliberation. Tanasoca is aware that these desiderata can be too ideal for mass deliberation, hence proposing that they might be relaxed to suit the real-world context. For example, she suggests that *rough* equality, instead of perfect equality, should be expected for networked deliberation, which is achieved across a variety of informal deliberative exchanges where all citizens engage (Tanasoca 2020: chapter 5).

Both Landemore and Tanasoca acknowledge that deliberative democracy should not be understood only as an ideal theory. Instead, for assessing and constructing deliberative democracy *in the real world*, no matter it is through experimentation or naturalization, the guiding principles must take into consideration not only the normative ideals but also the empirical reality, such that what they demand would be both normatively desirable and practically feasible. The formulation of such 'mid-range' prescriptive standards is helpful for bridging the philosophical and empirical dimensions of deliberative democracy (Bächtiger 2019).

Landemore's and Tanasoca's arguments remind us that there is no need to draw a sharp divide between the ideal and non-ideal theories of deliberative democracy. The normative principles used for assessing the desirable qualities of deliberative democracy can be normatively justifiable and sensitive to empirical conditions at the same time.

Method

Another related contribution concerns the method of political theorizing. For Landemore, her model of open democracy is far from a conclusion deduced from some abstract, fundamental principles but is developed based on direct observation of real-life deliberative experimentation. She demonstrates how inductive political theorizing is possible through empirical case studies, by looking at how people would like to experiment with novel methods and procedures in actual democracies, she infers principles that are, at the same time, consistent with the ideal of democracy and acceptable to the people in actual democracies. This enables us to construct normative theories of deliberative democracy to be sensitive to the 'already widely shared' collective views and intuitions, such that they are not only normatively desirable but also empirically tractable (Landemore 2020: chapters 7 and 8; Thacher 2006).

Similarly, Tanasoca's idea of naturalized deliberation is grounded in the empirical analysis of citizen deliberation in 'naturalistic' settings, i.e., the real existing deliberative democracy. She describes her normative theory of deliberative democracy as 'middle-range,' meaning that she is interested not quite in theorizing what deliberative democracy *should* be as an ideal, but instead in proposing what deliberative democracy *can* be like given the empirical conditions in the real world. In this way, Tanasoca illustrates how the divide between empirical and normative methods can be married up, the understanding

of what *is* happening in a non-ideal reality informs us of what *can* be included as *feasible* normative desiderata for deliberative democracy (Tanasoca 2020: chapter 1).

Once again, both Landemore and Tanasoca demonstrate how we can bridge the gap between ideal and non-ideal theories of deliberative democracy. They provide us with concrete methods for making the normative theorizing of deliberative democracy sensitive to empirical deliberative politics in the real world.

Reflections

Despite the solid contributions of Landemore and Tanasoca's work, the ideas of open democracy and naturalized deliberation still deserve some further scrutiny.

Blind deference?

Landemore's proposal of experimentation relies heavily on the use of novel deliberative institutions. As pointed out previously, Landemore suggests an ideal institution for open democracy—i.e., 'open mini-public'—a type of deliberative mini-public with 150 to 1,000 randomly selected participants. It is open in the sense that, while it recognizes the participation rights of ordinary citizens, it allows them to choose whether and when to participate in such an institution. In other words, mass participation of citizens is not required at any time, and citizens can as well delegate their decision-making power to their representatives chosen through sortition or other democratic means. In short, Landemore's model is not premised on mass participation.

In *Democracy without Shortcuts*, Cristina Lafont (2020a) warns us against the reliance on any reformed democratic institutions, including deliberative mini-publics. Lafont argues that some of these institutions would intensify rather than alleviate democratic deficits as in the existing representative democracy, they can at most be regarded as 'shortcuts' that bypass meaningful public deliberation of political decisions and hence eroding the ideal of democratic self-rule. She writes succinctly, 'The road to an undemocratic hell might be paved by good democratic intentions' (p. 3).

Lafont specifies the conditions under which democratic institutions remain as problematic shortcuts, they require citizens to blindly defer to the decisions of others. For instance, if a mini-public is organized in a way such that, those who are not selected as participants have no reason to believe that the participants are making decisions that track the considered judgments of both the participants and non-participants, then blind deference is said to be present in such mini-public. In this way, the decisions made in those mini-publics are the decisions of the participants only, rather than the decisions of the citizenry at large.

It would be worth discussing whether Landemore's open mini-publics are vulnerable to the issue of blind deference. On the one hand, Landemore seems to emphasize the decision-making functions of these deliberative institutions, as reflected from two of the core institutional principles: deliberation and majoritarianism. On the other hand, citizens remain free to choose whether or not to participate

in these institutions. If such experimentation involves collective decision-making but requires voluntary, flexible participation, it makes sense to suggest that there will be anyway some non-participants delegating their decision-making power to the participants. On what grounds can we believe that the former is not doing so blindly to the latter?

The challenge for Landemore is that, while we respect citizens' freedom to choose whether or not, as well as when and how, to participate in her experimentation, how can we ensure that, when citizens are exercising such freedom, they are not giving up their capacity for democratic control altogether? Landemore would have to demonstrate how the ideal of democratic self-rule can be secured without mass participation in her experimentation, or why her open mini-publics would not degenerate into shortcuts that bypass deliberation among the citizenry at large.

One response for Landemore would be to look at the reasons behind the choices of citizens, such as why they choose to participate in the way they do and/or why they choose not to participate at all. For instance, as Lafont (2020b) suggests, citizens who choose not to participate can have reasons to expect alignment between the participants' decisions and the decisions that they would endorse upon reflection. If there are no such reasons, deference is considered blind, such as randomly choosing whether and how to participate by tossing a coin. By contrast, if there are some reasons to delegate the deliberation and decisions to others, deference is considered not blind, such as deferring highly technical decisions to experts.

The key is to build experimentation that does not, at least, encourage randomness and arbitrariness in delegation for deliberation and decisions. This will require citizens to actively reflect on their choices of participation, such that they understand why they are (not) participating in the experimentation in the way they do as well as why the decisions of (other) participants can align with their values, beliefs, and interests. Arguably, there is no way we can avoid active engagement of citizens in the process of delegation, regardless of whether mass participation is expected in the process of deliberation and decisions.

To be fair, Landemore is in no sense agnostic about active engagement of citizens. She is, for example, aware of the importance of linking participants in the mini-publics to the larger population through crowdsourcing platforms and other deliberative forums. She also aspires to cultivate and nurture open-mindedness in ordinary citizens through the use of open mini-publics. That said, it is still possible for citizens to choose randomly or arbitrarily as to whether and how to participate in such deliberative experimentation. It remains an open question as to whether these institutions can ever enhance, rather than compromise, the ideal of democratic self-governance.

Natural as reasonable?

On the other hand, Tanasoca's proposal of naturalization puts emphasis on informal networked deliberation that is already existing among citizens in the public sphere. Any organized, structured interactions as in deliberative events are 'artificial' and should at most be treated as a

means to improving the deliberative quality of the entire deliberative system. In other words, micro-deliberations in the formal, 'artificially engineered' institutions, such as Landemore's open mini-publics, are valuable if and only if they can produce positive macro-systemic effects. Even if deliberations in these institutions are bad (e.g., ritual deliberation), they can still indirectly produce good deliberative systemic effects, such as promoting genuinely deliberative ends in other parts of the deliberative system.

It is reasonable to consider discursive interactions in the informal public sphere as legitimate sites for deliberative democracy, but common sense tells us that some of these interactions are non-deliberative and even morally problematic, such as exchanges involving epistemic injustice that undermines the mutual respect of certain interlocutors. If micro-deliberations as in the naturalistic setting serve only as a means to enhancing the performance of the deliberative system, it remains possible that some morally unacceptable micro-deliberations will be tolerated or even valued instrumentally by the system as a whole. As Owen and Smith (2015) point out, such a systemic perspective 'all too easily becomes a functional defence of non-deliberative acts and practices that does not cohere with even the minimal requirements of mutual respect that all theorists consider central to deliberation per se' (p. 22). The issue is that, if we are not rejecting the systemic view of deliberative democracy altogether, how 'bad' the deliberations at the micro-level should we be prepared to accept for naturalized deliberation?

What is existing naturally might not be at all reasonable. Likewise, some discursive interactions are problematic per se, even if they might bring about indirect positive effects on the deliberative system. Any deliberative wrongs done on *individual* interlocutors, as in the example of epistemic injustice, cannot simply be offset or neutralized by the genuinely deliberative ends promoted elsewhere in the system. Otherwise, we suffer the same problem as utilitarianism of failing to treat *individual* persons as ends in themselves but only as a means to the system. This undoubtedly compromises the ethical function of a deliberative system (Mansbridge et al. 2012).

It is understandable that Tanasoca (and other systemic theorists) are aware of the limits of how real existing deliberative democracy can 'realistically embody the ideal' (Tanasoca 2020: 5). It might be sensible to say that, in face of the reality constraints, the normative conditions can be relaxed, or they need not be all satisfied at the same time. That said, there are still merits for stipulating the bottom-line as to which discursive interactions or non-deliberative acts and practices should be rejected by the deliberative system in the first place. Otherwise, not only is the ideal of deliberative democracy compromised but also the concept of deliberation might be stretched too far (Goodin 2019). As Goodin assertively writes, '[while] all of the stretches do have the virtue of realism... to stretch the ideal [of deliberative democracy] too far is to abandon it altogether' (p. 893).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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